

THE 1989 REVOLUTIONS

in Central and Eastern Europe

From Communism to Pluralism

EDITED BY KEVIN McDERMOTT AND MATTHEW STIBBE

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THE 1989 REVOLUTIONS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE



Manchester University Press

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From Communism to Pluralism

Edited by
Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe

Manchester University Press
Manchester and New York
*distributed in the United States exclusively
by Palgrave Macmillan*

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Published by Manchester University Press
Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9NR, UK
and Room 400, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA
www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk

Distributed in the United States exclusively by
Palgrave Macmillan, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York,
NY 10010, USA

Distributed in Canada exclusively by
UBC Press, University of British Columbia, 2029 West Mall,
Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z2

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data applied for

ISBN 978 07190 8527 7 hardback

First published 2013

The publisher has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for any external or third-party internet websites referred to in this book, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Typeset by Carnegie Book Production, Lancaster

Contents

<i>Notes on contributors</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
<i>List of abbreviations and glossary of terms</i>	xi
<i>Timeline: Eastern Europe, 1945–91</i>	xiv
<i>Leaders of East European and Soviet communist parties, 1945–91</i>	xvii
<i>East European communist parties and their post-communist successors</i>	xix
1 The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe: origins, processes, outcomes <i>Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe</i>	1
Part I The historical <i>longue durée</i>	
2 Echoes and precedents: 1989 in historical perspective <i>Robin Okey</i>	33
Part II The ‘Gorbachev factor’	
3 The multifaceted external Soviet role in processes towards unanticipated revolutions <i>Mary Buckley</i>	55
4 ‘When your neighbour changes his wallpaper’: the ‘Gorbachev factor’ and the collapse of the German Democratic Republic <i>Peter Grieder</i>	73

Part III The East European revolutions: internal and external perspectives

5	The demise of communism in Poland: a staged evolution or failed revolution?	95
	<i>Tom Junes</i>	
6	The international context of Hungarian transition, 1989: the view from Budapest	113
	<i>László Borhi</i>	
7	Creating security from below: peace movements in East and West Germany in the 1980s	136
	<i>Holger Nehring</i>	
8	The demise of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, 1987–89: a socio-economic perspective	154
	<i>Michal Pullmann</i>	
9	Discourse and power: the FSN and the mythologisation of the Romanian revolution	172
	<i>Kevin Adamson and Sergiu Florean</i>	
10	A revolution in two stages: the curiosity of the Bulgarian case	192
	<i>Elena Simeonova</i>	
 Part IV Then and now: continuity and change in the academic and cultural perceptions of the communist era and its aftermath		
11	A hopeless case of optimism? Jürgen Kuczynski and the end of the GDR	213
	<i>Matthew Stibbe</i>	
12	Meanings of 1989: right-wing discourses in post-communist Poland	235
	<i>Artur Lipiński</i>	
13	From the ‘thirst for change’ and ‘hunger for truth’ to a ‘revolution that hardly happened’: public protests and reconstructions of the past in Bulgaria in the 1990s	253
	<i>Nikolai Vukov</i>	
14	Afterword: the discursive constitution of revolution and revolution envy	271
	<i>James Krapfl</i>	
	<i>Select bibliography</i>	285
	<i>Index</i>	289

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Acknowledgements

The editors would like to express their gratitude to the British Academy, sponsor of the conference at Sheffield Hallam University in September 2009 from which many of the contributions to this volume are drawn. They would also like to thank Susie, Frankie and Alex, and Sam, Nicholas and Hannah.

Abbreviations and glossary of terms

BCP	Bulgarian Communist Party
Brezhnev Doctrine	Doctrine that sanctioned Soviet intervention in the domestic affairs of Eastern Europe countries whenever the socialist order was perceived to be under threat, for instance in Czechoslovakia in 1968
BSP	Bulgarian Socialist Party
Bundestag	(West) German parliament
Bundeswehr	(West) German army
BZNS	Bulgarian Agrarian National Union
CC	Central Committee (of Communist Party)
CDU	Christian Democratic Union (West Germany)
COMECON	Council for Mutual Economic Aid
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CPUN	Provisional Council of National Unity (Romania)
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
EC	European Community
<i>Ecoglasnost</i>	Bulgarian pressure group
END	European Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
EU	European Union
FDP	Free Democrat Party (West Germany)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany)
FSN	National Salvation Front (Romania)
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
<i>glasnost</i>	Gorbachev's policy of 'openness'
IFM	Initiative for Peace and Human Rights (GDR)
IMF	International Monetary Fund

KGB	Committee for State Security (USSR)
KOR	Workers' Defence Committee (Poland)
KPD	Communist Party of Germany
KSC	Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
<i>Die Linke</i>	The Left, German political party, successor to the PDS
MDF	Hungarian Democratic Forum
MFN	Most-favoured nation
MfS	Ministry for State Security (GDR), better known as the Stasi
MRF	Movement for Rights and Freedom (Bulgaria)
MSzMP	Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party
MSzP	Hungarian Socialist Party
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
<i>Neues Forum</i>	New Forum, East German dissident group
<i>nomenklatura</i>	List of key administrative appointments approved by the party
NVA	National People's Army (GDR)
NZS	Independent Students' Association (Poland)
OMGUS	Office of Military Government (American)
PD-L	Liberal Democratic Party (Romania)
PDS	Party of Democratic Socialism (GDR/Germany)
<i>perestroika</i>	Gorbachev's policy of 'restructuring' or 'reconstruction'
PNL	National Liberal Party (Romania)
PNȚ	National Peasant Party (Romania)
<i>Podkrepa</i>	'Support', independent Bulgarian trade union
Politburo	Leading body of communist parties
PSD	Social Democratic Party (Romania)
PZPR	Polish United Workers' Party
RSA	Movement for an Alternative Society (Poland)
<i>samizdat</i>	Self-publishing
SDI	Strategic Defence Initiative
<i>Securitate</i>	Romanian secret police
SED	Socialist Unity Party of Germany (GDR)
Sejm	Lower house of the Polish parliament
Solidarity	Independent (non-communist) Polish trade union
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany (West Germany)

Stasi	East German secret police
UDF	Union of Democratic Forces (Bulgaria)
UDMR/RMDSz	Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania
UN	United Nations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Volkshammer	East German parliament
Warsaw Pact	Soviet-led military organisation
WiP	Freedom and Peace Movement (Poland)

Timeline: Eastern Europe, 1945–91

1944–45	Liberation of large parts of Central and Eastern Europe by Red Army
1945–48	Process of establishing communist regimes
1948–54	Stalinist mass repression and ‘show trials’ of non-communist and communist ‘enemies’
March 1953	Death of Josef Stalin
June 1953	Uprising in East Germany
May 1955	Establishment of Warsaw Pact
February 1956	Nikita Khrushchev’s ‘secret speech’ denouncing Stalin’s ‘cult of personality’ at the Twentieth Congress of Soviet Communist Party
October–November 1956	‘Polish October’ and anti-Stalinist Hungarian Revolution crushed by Soviet tanks
August 1961	Construction of Berlin Wall
October 1964	Leonid Brezhnev replaces Khrushchev as Soviet party leader
August 1968	‘Prague Spring’ reforms in Czechoslovakia aborted by Soviet-led invasion
December 1970	Mass strikes in Poland
June 1976	Mass strikes in Poland and creation of KOR (Workers’ Defence Committee)
January 1977	Creation of ‘Charter 77’ human rights movement in Czechoslovakia
August 1980	Mass strikes and creation of independent ‘Solidarity’ trade union movement in Poland

December 1981	Declaration of martial law in Poland and banning of ‘Solidarity’
November 1982	Death of Leonid Brezhnev
February 1984	Death of Yuri Andropov, Brezhnev’s successor
March 1985	Death of Konstantin Chernenko, Andropov’s successor
March 1985	Mikhail Gorbachev appointed General Secretary of Soviet Communist Party
1986–91	Gorbachev pursues policies of <i>perestroika</i> (reconstruction) and <i>glasnost</i> (openness)

1989:

February–April	Round Table talks in Poland between communist and opposition leaders
2 May	Hungarian prime minister Miklós Németh announces first stage in dismantling of previously closed border with Austria
June–September	Round Table talks in Hungary
4 June	‘Solidarity’ triumphs in Polish elections
16 June	Imre Nagy, executed Hungarian leader of the 1956 revolution, is re-buried with full state honours
7–8 July	Summit of Warsaw Pact leaders in Bucharest ends in failure to agree a common agenda on reform
19 August	‘Pan-European picnic’ in the Hungarian border town of Sopron advertises new freedom of movement across the Iron Curtain
24 August	Tadeusz Mazowiecki (‘Solidarity’) becomes first non-communist prime minister of Poland since 1947
10–11 September	Hungary’s announcement that East German citizens will not be prevented from crossing the border into Austria sparks a refugee crisis in the GDR
September–October	Mass vigils and demonstrations in Leipzig and other East German cities

7 October	Reformists in the ruling Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSzMP) succeed in changing party's name to Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), marking a new commitment to social democratic values
23 October	The Hungarian People's Republic becomes simply the Hungarian Republic
9 November	Berlin Wall breached and partially dismantled
10 November	Palace revolution in Bulgaria; Communist leadership deposes Todor Zhivkov
17 November	Repressed student march in Prague marks start of 'Velvet Revolution' in Czechoslovakia
25 December	Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu 'tried' and executed in Romania

1990:

March–June	Non-communist governments elected in the GDR, Hungary and Czechoslovakia; post-communist parties remain in power in Romania and Bulgaria
October	German reunification; GDR ceases to exist and is absorbed into the German Federal Republic (FRG)

1991:

August	Failed coup attempt by hardliners to oust Gorbachev
December	Dissolution of USSR; Boris Yeltsin replaces Gorbachev as president of new Russian Federation

Leaders of East European and Soviet communist parties, 1945–91

Bulgaria

1946–49	Georgi Dimitrov
1949–54	Valko Chervenkov
1954–89	Todor Zhivkov
1989–90	Petar Mladenov

Czechoslovakia

1929–53	Klement Gottwald
1953–68	Antonín Novotný
1968–69	Alexander Dubček
1969–87	Gustáv Husák
1987–89	Miloš Jakeš
1989 (November–December)	Karel Urbánek

East Germany (GDR)

1946–71	Walter Ulbricht
1971–89	Erich Honecker
1989 (October–December)	Egon Krenz

Hungary

1945–56	Mátyás Rákosi
1956 (July–October)	Ernö Gerö
1956–88	János Kádár
1988–89	Károly Grósz
1989 (June–October)	Rezső Nyers

Poland

1943–48	Władysław Gomułka
1948–56	Bolesław Bierut
1956 (April–October)	Edward Ochab
1956–70	Władysław Gomułka
1970–80	Edward Gierek
1980–81	Stanisław Kania
1981–89	Wojciech Jaruzelski
1989–90	Mieczysław Rakowski

Romania

1944–65	Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej
1965–89	Nicolae Ceaușescu

USSR

1928–53	Josef Stalin
1953–56	Interregnum ‘collective leadership’
1956–64	Nikita Khrushchev
1964–82	Leonid Brezhnev
1982–84	Yuri Andropov
1984–85	Konstantin Chernenko
1985–91	Mikhail Gorbachev

East European communist parties and their post-communist successors

Bulgaria

Bulgarian Communist Party (*Balgarska Komunisticheska Partiya*, BCP), founded 1919

succeeded in April 1990 by

Bulgarian Socialist Party (*Balgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya*, BSP)

Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovak Communist Party (*Komunistická strana Československa*, KSČ), founded 1921, federated 1990 and dissolved December 1992

succeeded in March 1990 by

Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (*Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy*, KSČM)

and in August 1992 by

Communist Party of Slovakia (*Komunistická strana Slovenska*, KSS)

East Germany

Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED), founded 1946

succeeded in December 1989 by

Party of Democratic Socialism (*Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus*, PDS)

succeeded in June 2007 by

The Left (*Die Linke*)

Hungary

Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt*, MSzMP), founded 1956

succeeded in October 1989 by

Hungarian Socialist Party (*Magyar Szocialista Párt*, MSzP)

Poland

Polish United Workers' Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*, PZPR), founded 1948
succeeded in January 1990 by
Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (*Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, SdRP)

Romania

Romanian Communist Party (*Partidul Comunist Român*, PCR), founded 1921
dissolved in December 1989; replaced by
National Salvation Front (*Frontul Salvării Naționale*, FSN)

1

The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe: origins, processes, outcomes

Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe

‘People think of history in the long term’, comments the narrator Nathan Zuckerman in Philip Roth’s novel *American Pastoral*, ‘but history, in fact, is a very sudden thing’.¹ While Roth was referring to the social upheavals in the USA in the late 1960s and early 1970s and their impact on the town of Newark, New Jersey, when he wrote this, it might equally apply to the political transformations in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Even in January 1989, few observers predicted how speedily, completely and irrevocably the communist systems which had dominated this region since 1945 would disappear, to be replaced, in the main, by liberal parliamentary systems based on the western model. Western leaders were left struggling to find historical parallels. The French president François Mitterrand, for instance, declared at an important international summit in Paris in November 1990 that this was ‘the first time in history that we witness a change in depth of the European landscape which is not the outcome of a war or a bloody revolution’.² Only in the much darker circumstances of the civil war in Yugoslavia, during which he visited the besieged town of Sarajevo on the historically significant date of 28 June 1992, the 78th anniversary of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was Mitterrand able to regain some of his historical bearings.³

More than twenty years have now passed since these pivotal events in European and world history.⁴ Even so, historians are still wrestling with many intractable questions that arise from the revolutions of 1989: why did the seemingly impregnable fortresses of communism disintegrate so rapidly in the autumn of that year?; with the notable exception of Romania, why was this historic transformation achieved so peacefully?; to what extent were these ‘revolutions’ in the classical sense of the term, or were they rather, in Timothy Garton Ash’s famous compound, ‘refolutions’?; were internal or external developments the main motor of change?; what role did

'the people' play in the overthrow of communism, or, conversely, did the machinations of leading individuals account for the extraordinary events?; how far do political, ideological or economic factors explain the demise?; was the collapse inherent in the utopianism of communism's modernising spirit and its unshakable belief in hyper-centralist economic and political structures?; to what extent can we speak of a unitary revolutionary phenomenon across the eastern half of the continent, or are national and regional specificities as important as common features?; and, perhaps most contentiously, what is the legacy and meaning of the fall of communism and what discursive strategies have East Europeans themselves employed since 1989 to characterise their recent history in the search for a usable past? These issues form the backbone of the chapters in this book.

Much ink has been expended by both political scientists and historians on the roots of communism's dissolution and several grand narratives expounded on the *annus mirabilis* of 1989.⁵ One highly influential concept is that of 'civil society', which has often been emphasised as the crucial element in the transformations. In this view, it was the 'dissident' intellectuals and other nascent pluralistic oppositional forces who in their constant 'heroic' struggles against the repressive banality of the 'system', exposed the immorality and paradoxical powerlessness of the communist state.⁶ It is a compelling theory, but one that has its opponents. Stephen Kotkin, for example, has categorically rejected the notion that emergent 'civil societies' essentially brought about the end of the communist regimes. For him, 'civil society' was a *consequence* of the revolutions, not the cause. It was rather the implosion of 'uncivil society', the 'incompetent, blinkered, and ultimately bankrupt Communist establishments', which hastened the collapse.⁷ Others have maintained that the revolutions were an unintended outcome precipitated by Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness), and particularly his refusal to bail out the beleaguered 'dinosaurs' in the misguided hope that popular reformist mini-Gorbachevs were waiting in the wings of the East European parties to replace the despised conservative hardliners. Indeed, what Archie Brown calls the 'Gorbachev factor' is a key variable that informs much of the thinking on 1989, Vladimir Tismaneanu aptly summarising the opinions of many experts thus: without Gorbachev 'the revolutions of 1989 would have been barely thinkable'.⁸

In another recent overview, Constantine Pleshakov argues provocatively, and not always internally consistently, that 'what happened in Eastern Europe was a clash of classes revealed as civil war in Poland and Romania, nonviolent revolution in Czechoslovakia, and peaceful transfer of power in Hungary and Bulgaria'.⁹ Robin Okey, both in his contribution to this volume ([chapter 2](#)) and in an earlier monograph, has adopted a *longue durée* comparative methodology, contextualising the East European events

through the lens of the revolutionary traditions and spirit of 1789, 1848 and 1917.¹⁰ Mary Buckley, in [chapter 3](#), also provides a succinct overview of recent theoretical and social scientific writing on revolution. Building on this, many of our other contributors seek to historicise and problematise the notion that revolutions, in order to be genuine, radical or true to a supposed tradition, necessarily also have to be violent. This was certainly the view in the 1990s, when attachment to political ideologies, and hopes of mass mobilisation for positive political ends, seemed to have faded and instead all political action, by leaders and dissidents, the privileged and the under-privileged alike, was seen as being motivated solely by a never-ending desire for power. As late as 2000, for instance, Robert V. Daniels could argue that ‘the anti-Communist revolutions [of 1989–91 were] quite unrevolutionary in form, however revolutionary their consequences’ and that ‘more than anything else [they represented] a triumph of ethnic identity’.¹¹

Yet, over a decade on from this there are signs that the twentieth anniversary of the overthrow of communism in Eastern Europe, combined with more recent events such as the ‘Rose Revolution’ in Georgia, the ‘Orange Revolution’ in Ukraine and the Arab Spring of 2011, have caused some historians, particularly on the left, to highlight the essentially peaceful, revolutionary and radical-democratic aspirations of 1989 and to look for possible precedents and parallels in the past.¹² Others, acting outside classical left-wing assumptions, have used comparative approaches in order to stress the ‘contingent’, ‘fragile’ and ‘partly tactical’ nature of non-violence in some revolutions and movements of civil resistance, the role of force, bloodshed and outside military intervention in others, and the different/subtle forms of inter-connectedness between these two scenarios.¹³ For Chris Armbruster, for instance, the notion of a ‘peaceful revolution’ might *describe* what happened in 1989 but cannot satisfactorily *explain* it except in overly simplistic terms as ‘one bright moment’ in an otherwise bloody twentieth (and early twenty-first) century. Instead he prefers the model of a ‘self-limiting’ or ‘negotiated revolution’, as this ‘recognises the continuing hold of violence and the prevalence of conflict’ in the world since 1989, and also the ‘dark legacy of fascism and communism’ for the people of Central and Eastern Europe in particular.¹⁴

The position we take in this volume is that 1989 was a genuine and popular revolution in both form and content, with complex political and social, local, national and international, violent and non-violent, and long-term and short-term causes, but this does not mean that we believe that the collapse of communism was inevitable or predetermined. Rather, following Okey, we argue that communism was not simply an ‘unnatural yoke’ around the necks of many East Europeans, but was a powerful, and not entirely negative, historical force capable of remoulding and modernising

societies, cultures and economies.¹⁵ We have also been influenced by the work of scholars like Mary Fulbrook who avoid the pitfalls of the standard linear accounts of the downfall of communism ‘in stages’ (with emphasis on ‘flashpoints’ like 1953, 1956, 1968, 1980–81) by offering a more nuanced view of the interplay between societal developments and state policies.¹⁶ Finally, while many historians place the GDR, and in particular the fall of the Berlin Wall, at the centre of their narrative of the events of 1989,¹⁷ more recent interpretations – which we follow – focus on the pivotal role played by Hungary’s reformist communist leaders in destabilising the East German regime and the entire Warsaw Pact alliance by opening up their country’s border with Austria and then allowing East German refugees to pass through.¹⁸

What these competing explanations share, in our view, is a salutary focus on the complex interplay between internal and external developments as opposed to an exclusive emphasis on Cold War geopolitical power struggles and the populist triumphalist rhetoric of how the ‘freedom-loving’ USA ‘defeated’ the ‘totalitarian’ Soviet Union. Our contributors have subsequently approached the East European revolutions from a variety of angles, emphasising in turn generational conflicts (Junes, [chapter 5](#)), socio-economic and domestic aspects (Pullmann and Simeonova, [chapters 8 and 10](#)), international features (Borhi, [chapter 6](#)), the ‘Gorbachev factor’ (Buckley and Grieder, [chapters 3 and 4](#)), and the role of peace movements (Nehring, [chapter 7](#)) or discourses on revolution (Adamson and Florean, [chapter 9](#)). In line with the sub-title of the volume, we have deliberately avoided imposing an overarching model or interpretation. Where we all agree, however, is in rejecting the idea that the 1989 revolutions were a ‘secondary phenomenon’, significant only in relation to the bigger issue, namely the collapse of the once mighty Soviet economy and of Moscow’s ‘central authority’ over the entire land mass ‘between the Elbe and the China seas’.¹⁹ In our view, the sudden demise of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe constitutes an important historical event in its own right, and should not simply be seen as a prelude to the break-up of the Soviet Union some two years later and the termination of the world-defying and world-changing project begun by Lenin in 1917.

Origins

The aim of this volume is to reconsider the origins, processes and outcomes of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. Leaving aside the role of Gorbachev, which we shall return to at the end of this section and the beginning of the next, scholars have identified a number of key causes of ‘1989’.

Economic stagnation

While in the late 1950s and 1960s many observers spoke of a growing convergence between the economic and social models of industrial development adopted in the West and the Soviet bloc, both of which involved increasing amounts of planning, government intervention and advice from politically neutral scientific ‘experts’, by the early 1980s all the talk was about divergence. The West was associated with flexible labour markets, openness to new technologies, consumer-driven policies and a willingness to pay the political price of economic change in terms of high levels of unemployment. The East, on the other hand, was characterised by obsolete industries, bureaucratic resistance to reform, low labour productivity, high rates of indebtedness to the West and constant shortages of housing, basic foodstuffs and consumer goods. Above all it was being left behind in terms of growth, so that, for instance, whereas in 1870 and again in 1951 the per capita GDP of Eastern Europe stood at 51 per cent of that of Western Europe, by 1973 it had fallen to 47 per cent and by 1989 to 40 per cent.²⁰ Worse still, this poor economic performance came at a time when rising living standards in the West were increasingly visible to the populations of the East; for example, through television and radio, improved (albeit still limited) opportunities for travel abroad, family visits and reunions made possible under the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, and the inward flow of western tourists to East European capitals and holiday resorts. Even relatively poor West European countries which at various points in the 1970s had looked like they might turn from right-wing authoritarianism to communism, such as Portugal, Spain and Greece, had apparently shown by the 1980s that capitalism, or a social democratic version of the same, offered the quickest route to prosperity, social harmony and stable parliamentary politics.²¹

East European leaders and their Soviet counterparts were not entirely unaware of these challenges. In the USSR military experts in particular were coming to realise that their own budgets, and their increasing inability to keep pace with the USA in terms of weapons technology, were intimately connected to wider issues of economic (non)performance. In Czechoslovakia, economists called for the removal of state subsidies and their replacement with ‘real’ prices as a means of introducing competition and related efficiencies.²² However, proposals for reform were generally blocked by party officials and managers who were concerned that change would lead to job losses or social discontent and thus harm their attempts to appease ordinary workers; indeed in the 1980s one of communism’s last remaining claims to legitimacy was that it had avoided the mass unemployment now characteristic of the capitalist West. Yet this policy was a double-edged sword, for the state’s assertion that it represented the true interests of workers might instead unite them in collective anger over

wages, prices, shortages and lack of independent trade unions – as seen especially in Poland in 1970, 1976 and 1980–81.²³ By contrast, in the West even some on the left were beginning to recognise that the political power of labour, and in particular its ability to challenge state policies, including the privatisation of publicly owned industries and the introduction of new curbs on trade union power, was weakening as economies relied less on manufacturing and heavy industry and the nature of work and leisure became increasingly diversified.²⁴

Soviet ‘over-extension’ abroad and problems closer to home

While East European leaders were to some extent able to close their eyes to growing economic problems, especially as western banks were still willing to lend them money (which they generally used to subsidise food and housing costs in the present rather than to invest in new technologies for the future),²⁵ their self-confidence was more directly undermined by evidence of the diminished international standing of the Soviet Union, even before Gorbachev’s advent to power. The legalisation of the independent trade union Solidarity by the Polish government in response to mass strikes in August 1980 was a case in point, as it challenged the whole basis of communist rule across the Soviet bloc and threatened to bring about a situation similar to that in Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968. This time, however, events took a different course. The remarkable decision not to intervene militarily in Poland in 1980–81, which came in spite of repeated calls from other Warsaw Pact leaders like Erich Honecker, Gustáv Husák and Todor Zhivkov to restore order,²⁶ was interpreted as a sign of weakness and raised fears that the Soviet armed forces were ‘overstretched’,²⁷ particularly following the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

On top of this came the death, in rapid succession, of Soviet leaders Leonid Brezhnev (1982), Yuri Andropov (1984) and Konstantin Chernenko (1985), all of whom were visibly ailing in their last months in office, and increased East–West tensions, especially in early 1983 when US president Ronald Reagan made his ‘evil empire’ speech and announced his ‘star wars’ or Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) programme in violation of previous nuclear treaties. Meanwhile, Soviet-led initiatives in foreign policy dating back to the 1960s and 1970s, such as support for the Palestine Liberation Organisation against Israel, or for left-wing rebels and pro-communist regimes in developing countries, were increasingly seen as a distraction from priorities closer to home.²⁸ The triumphalism of 1975, when the last American advisers withdrew from Saigon and communism was able to claim victory over all of Vietnam, had given way to an inward-looking defensive mood just a few years later, one in which East European leaders felt that they could ‘no longer discount the possibility that the Polish

disease might spread'.²⁹ Distrust of Poland indeed continued even after the government there declared martial law in December 1981, and moved to ban the Solidarity trade union in October 1982.

Transnational human rights activism/advocacy

Another legacy of the 1970s was the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), signed by thirty-three European countries, as well as Canada and the USA, in Helsinki in 1975. At first the Helsinki Final Act was interpreted as a great triumph for Soviet diplomacy, and for Brezhnev personally, as it confirmed the inviolability of state borders and thus secured western recognition of the frontiers of the post-1945 eastern bloc. Yet at the follow-up meetings of the CSCE in Belgrade (1977–79), Madrid (1980–83) and Vienna (1986–89), it became increasingly apparent that the failure of the Soviet Union and its East European allies to adhere to the human rights provisions of the Act could be used as a tool of US policy, allowing it to shame the USSR into making a number of concessions on the political as well as the humanitarian fronts. Eventually this changed the whole meaning of detente, security and cooperation in ways that were unforeseen in 1975. At the same time, new transnational ties and informal knowledge-sharing agreements were established between US state department officials, private Helsinki monitoring groups, individual human rights activists in East and West, and Soviet dissidents, all of whom agreed that Moscow's official line (until 1986) that the CSCE Final Act did not allow interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign states should not prevent them from carrying out their duty to question any member country about its human rights record.³⁰

In Eastern Europe the Helsinki process had a more limited impact. Formal human rights monitoring groups were established in Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1976–77, and looser associations of individual activists also emerged in Hungary and the GDR. However, in Romania the attempt to organise an open letter to the CSCE exposing human rights violations by the Ceaușescu regime was swiftly crushed by the secret police, and its chief sponsor, Paul Goma, was sent into exile.³¹ Charter 77, the main Czechoslovak group, started out in January 1977 with just 243 signatories, and collected only another 1,621 in the ten years that followed.³² Several of its leading sponsors were imprisoned. The only real evidence of transnational links came in two meetings held on the Polish-Czechoslovak border between Charter 77 and representatives of the Polish Workers' Defence Committee (KOR), founded in 1976. In 1978, on the tenth anniversary of the crushing of the Prague Spring, the two groups put out a joint declaration.³³

In East Germany dissident activism was split between those who focused mainly on the right to emigrate, and those, as Holger Nehring

shows in [chapter 7](#), whose chief interest was in the peace and anti-nuclear movements. The latter was mainly organised within the fold of the Protestant Church, which in turn shied away from open confrontation with the authorities. While peace was a contested term, East German activists agreed that it should be used in a way that was designed to overcome bi-polar Cold War divisions and strengthen inter-German relations rather than emphasising differences between East and West, a stance which was incompatible with one-sided criticism of the communist regime. It was not until 1985–86 that a totally independent political organisation was formed in the GDR, the *Initiative für Frieden und Menschenrechte* (Initiative for Peace and Human Rights or IFM). However, given the IFM's wide-ranging focus on domestic, social and peace issues it is probably more accurate to see the *Arbeitsgruppe Staatsbürgerschaftsrecht der DDR* (Working Group for GDR Citizenship Rights), founded in September 1987, as the first organisation in East Germany devoted exclusively to human rights.³⁴ In Bulgaria, human rights pressure groups came later still, at the turn of the year 1988–89, largely as a result of intellectual disquiet over the government's reckless disregard for environmental issues and its increasing persecution of ethnic Turks and Bulgarian Muslims, a theme taken up by Elena Simeonova and Nikolai Vukov in their contributions to this volume.

Yet although human rights activism had more to do with superpower diplomacy and the ending of the Cold War than it did with internal developments inside East European countries, exposure of abuses in these countries still had an impact in undermining the moral authority and reputation of the communist system.³⁵ This was especially the case as the new transnational interest in human rights in the 1970s coincided with the timely appearance and mass sale (in the West) of dissident work highlighting the historic crimes of the Bolshevik and Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union. Hugo Young, for example, in his critical biography of the British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, emphasises the importance of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's novels and writings, including *The First Circle* (1968) as well as *Gulag Archipelago* (1973), in shaping her previously rather limited understanding of Soviet politics and world affairs when she was leader of the opposition between 1975 and 1979.³⁶ Knowledge of these and similar dissident publications also reached the East through *samizdat*, radio broadcasts and television. For instance, Jürgen Kuczynski, the East German economist and critical Marxist intellectual discussed by Matthew Stibbe in this volume, noted in his memoirs that it was only in the 1970s and 1980s that he learned of the true extent of Stalin's terror in the 1930s.³⁷ Admittedly, unlike dissidents who formally broke with the established communist system, Kuczynski still believed in the historical necessity and progressive nature of the Soviet Union, and indeed lamented its passing in 1991 as much as he had mourned the end of the GDR in 1989–90. However,

even he was moved to write a book, finished in 1977 but not published until 1983, which explicitly mentioned the virulent anti-Semitism in the USSR under Stalin, hitherto a taboo theme for communist party activists. By contrast, until the late 1980s criticism of this kind was impossible in the Soviet Union itself, and even Gorbachev before 1990 refused to countenance an indigenous publication of *Gulag Archipelago* and similar works questioning the communist project as a whole.³⁸

Meanwhile, in spite of the Helsinki process, violations of human rights continued in Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. One example among many would be the several thousand people imprisoned in the GDR for attempting to flee the republic or (in more extreme cases) simply for applying for permission to emigrate to the West.³⁹ Another instance would be the kidnap and murder of the pro-Solidarity priest Father Jerzy Popiełuszko by the Polish secret police in 1984. However, by and large most East Europeans no longer lived in fear and terror, as they had done under Stalinism in the late 1940s and early 1950s (and earlier, under Nazism or German occupation). Refusal to conform could have unpleasant consequences, including blocked promotion, loss of employment or of a university place, and/or denial of a travel visa, but these and similar forms of 'soft coercion' were usually as far as things went.⁴⁰ Those workers who did not expect their children to attend university, were not looking to climb the career ladder themselves and did not aspire to go on trips abroad had precious little that could be taken away from them. Apathy rather than fear was what kept most East European regimes in power in the early to mid-1980s.

The role of ideas

As we have seen, the influence of the small 'dissident' enclaves, such as Charter 77, has tended to be exaggerated in the West, mythologised as the selfless 'heroic' resistance of intellectuals against the omnipotent state. But it cannot be denied that critical ideas and alternative visions, not necessarily strictly political or ideological, did play an important role in undermining the legitimacy of 'real existing socialism'. The classic example is Václav Havel's essay 'The Power of the Powerless', written in 1978 at the height of the post-Prague Spring 'normalisation'.⁴¹ In this seminal piece, Havel, a playwright and leading Chartist, attempted to diagnose the nature of power, conformity and dissent in what he termed the 'post-totalitarian system'. Re-examining the inter-relationship between state and society, Havel penetratingly and disturbingly exposed the involuntary social pillars of the system. The lines of conflict in the post-totalitarian state were not drawn according to social class, but ran through each person, 'for everyone in his or her own way is both a victim and a supporter of the system'. Hence, overt terror was no longer the defining feature of the system since

the methods of repression had become internalised, ‘naturalised’ for every citizen. This amoral mutual dependency between rulers and ruled reflected the compulsion of the post-totalitarian state to draw everyone into its sphere of power.

The alternative to this existential degradation and corruption was to ‘live within the truth’. Havel exhorted his fellow citizens not to acquiesce in communist rituals and lies, to overcome their fear and to rediscover their suppressed identities and dignity. This was possible and necessary, because no one, not even communist officials, believed any longer in the mobilising capacities of Marxism-Leninism. Paradoxically, ideology was both omnipotent and irrelevant. If the people refused to abide by the rules of the game – not simply by dramatic gestures like striking, demonstrating and rioting, but by speaking openly at a public meeting, organising a private rock or jazz concert, declining to mouth meaningless phrases and slogans, neglecting to vote in farcical elections – the apparently monolithic power structure will be revealed in all its nakedness and feebleness. Precisely here is the ‘power of the powerless’, because ‘living in truth’ represents the most fundamental political threat to a system which depends on mass compliance to the ‘lie’.

Havel’s message struck a chord, particularly among the educated, but the frailty of the communist state was not only exposed by the power of abstract theoretical concepts. As Padraic Kenney has suggested, ‘peace, ecology, conscientious objection, human rights and self-government’ – to which we might add religious engagement and gay rights activism – ‘were all part of a shared opposition to the regime’.⁴² Harsh practical realities were beginning to mobilise the populations of Eastern Europe and no issue was more potentially destabilising than the deep concerns over the environment, which gained relatively wide popular currency after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Ukraine in April 1986. Green concerns, pollution and poor air quality became sources of genuine public disaffection, and not just among ‘dissidents’ and restless youth. Increasingly, ‘ordinary’ citizens – often mothers of young children – petitioned local authorities to improve the environmental quality of life. From Wrocław to Bratislava, from Nagymaros to Liberec, the industrial ‘gigantomania’ so beloved of communist planners was impelling people to quietly challenge the regime and to stand up for their rights. Environmental concerns also engendered a certain resurgence of ideas about Central European cultural autonomy, national diversity and self-determination in opposition to perceived Soviet hegemony and centralised planning. The rise of western green movements in the 1980s, the desire to imitate their success and the glaringly obvious fact, often ignored by westerners, that Soviet-style communism was significantly more destructive to the Central European environment than free market capitalism, also helped here.⁴³

From 1987 onwards, cumulative actions – street demonstrations, artistic ‘happenings’, unofficial lectures and seminars, protest letters and petitions, ubiquitous *samizdat* publications, musical and theatrical events – served to undermine the confidence of communist regimes and test the limits of the leaderships’ tolerance and commitment to Soviet-style *perestroika*. The members of the loose organisations of young activists who arranged these ‘events’ were rarely explicitly political or overtly confrontational, but they were deemed and treated so by the authorities and hence often became radicalised and more prone to direct action than their ‘dissident’ elders, most of whom continued to believe in ‘traditional’ forms of dialogue and the power of the word.

More than this, oppositional activities undertaken in 1988 and 1989, some of them spontaneous, began to expose creeping fissures in the communist edifice with official bodies, such as the Socialist Union of Youth in Czechoslovakia, effectively giving institutional cover to ‘alternative’ forums like the Jazz Section and various ‘peace’ groupings and initiatives. To the extent that lower-level party and state bureaucrats, ‘official’ professionals and even more so rank-and-file party members, belonged to urban social groups and came into contact with ‘public opinion’, they may have shared, or at least sympathised with, certain aspects of popular cultural and ideological trends.⁴⁴ Hence, the great divide between rulers and ruled, between the power brokers and the powerless, was arguably not so stark in the Eastern Europe of the 1980s as is generally believed. Indeed, this degree of interaction between the ‘party-state’ and ‘civil society’ helps us to understand the revolutions of 1989 in that the internal cohesion, unity and sense of purpose of the communist elites had been undermined by long-term association with alternative discourses and value systems. Moreover, as Michal Pullmann (chapter 8) demonstrates in his detailed account of the vicissitudes of reform in Czechoslovakia, by the late 1980s there were indications that the contested language of *perestroika* itself was engendering a portentous fragmentation of communist hierarchies and a disintegration of the social consensus. It is even possible that the security forces, the coercive backbone of the communist state, were becoming resigned and dispirited, unsure of how to react to largely peaceful oppositional manifestations. If the regimes were not exactly crumbling from within, the vacillation, indecision and sense of drift were palpable to ever-growing numbers of people. Citizens were beginning to lose their fear.

The Gorbachev factor

Debate still rages about the precise nature of Gorbachev’s role in the demise of East European communism, and indeed there is no consensus on this pivotal question among our contributors. Perspectives differ depending

on methodological approach. If the emphasis is on high-level political, economic and military decision-making and complex diplomatic negotiations, then the Soviet leader occupies a central, even determining, space. If, however, the focus shifts to social movements and mass participation 'from below' in the overthrow of communism, Gorbachev's input becomes more opaque and ambiguous, though hardly invisible as shown by his popular reception during state visits. It is possible, too, that his influence was stronger in the GDR, as forcefully argued by Peter Grieder, than in Poland and Hungary and that his advisers and go-betweens often played a more direct role in Soviet–East European relations. He was rarely a radical reformer, at least before 1988–89, did not consciously seek to undermine incumbent conservative rulers and stuck, almost to a fault, to his principled stance of non-interference in the internal affairs of East European countries. That said, no scholar can seriously doubt Gorbachev's decisive impact on developments in the period 1985–90. Nowhere was his centrality more graphically illustrated than in his rejection of the 'Brezhnev doctrine',⁴⁵ a rejection which unravelled over time from an implied distaste for Soviet military intervention to uphold crumbling communist regimes to a far more explicit repudiation of that possibility in the last twelve months or so before the autumn of 1989. By then the days of armed Soviet 'fraternal assistance' were over.

It is difficult to summarise Gorbachev's evolving policies towards his East European allies, not least because they tended to be confused, improvised, contradictory and hesitant, regularly subordinated and subject to more pressing concerns both at home and abroad. Neither should it be forgotten that he was faced with an unenviable dilemma: how to initiate meaningful reform in Eastern Europe without destabilising the entire region? But one thing is certain: he had absolutely no intention of provoking the precipitous and definitive collapse of socialism and of the Soviet bloc, hitherto regarded by successive Kremlin leaders as the historic and inviolable product of the Red Army's victory in the Second World War. To this extent, the revolutions of 1989 were very much unpremeditated and unforeseen outcomes. The General Secretary's broad goal, as noted by Buckley, was to 'turn "little Brezhnevs" in Eastern Europe into "little Gorbachevs"'. That is, he sought, gradually and vicariously, to extend his domestic policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* to Prague, Warsaw and Budapest. Indeed, 'Gorbachev and his team believed that a reformed socialism in Eastern Europe was viable' and that 'by taking the initiative in democratizing these regimes, reformist Communist leaders could retain control of the process'.⁴⁶ Almost to the last, Gorbachev favoured, though did little actively to expedite, the replacement of diehard conservatives by younger moderates, like Hans Modrow in the GDR, who would renew the socialist agenda.

According to Jacques Lévesque, this 'democratisation' of Eastern Europe was an integral component of Gorbachev's larger vision for Europe and the world as a whole: none other than the transformation of the international order by a managed detente overcoming the continent's division, encapsulated in cherished concepts such as the 'common European home', human rights, global integration and interdependence. For Soviet reformers, these universal values were beginning to transcend narrow notions of power bloc rivalries, ideological conflict and nuclear proliferation.⁴⁷ This visionary 'solution' to an outdated bipolarised world was predicated on the continued existence of a socialist community of states in Eastern Europe, although in a significantly reformed, democratised and demilitarised guise. It would also, in turn, allow the economic regeneration of the USSR by severely curtailing the arms race, improving commercial and trading relations with the West and fostering technological advancement and modernisation.

The question has often been asked: did Gorbachev 'abandon' Eastern Europe in 1989 to concentrate on domestic priorities? Fundamentally, this is the interpretation of Tony Judt who maintains that 'Gorbachev was letting Communism fall in Eastern Europe in order to save it in Russia itself'.⁴⁸ This implies a sense of conscious individual agency and an imaginary bifurcation between external and internal policy. In reality, as we have seen, for Gorbachev the two were organically linked. Moreover, this proposition is hard to reconcile with the view of Jonathan Haslam, based on recently accessible archival records, that Gorbachev and the Soviet foreign ministry were concerned 'not to permit the erosion of socialism in Eastern Europe' and that he 'did his level best to forestall' the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. In addition, Haslam argues that 'more effective competition, not surrender [to the West], was always his ambition'.⁴⁹ Lévesque also implicitly rejects the notion of 'abandonment', affirming that 'it is quite clear ... the Soviet leadership intended to keep its allies and alliance system [in Eastern Europe]'.⁵⁰ Finally, Mark Kramer argues, albeit from a different perspective, that 'the peaceful disintegration of the bloc was the unintended consequence of Gorbachev's reorientation of Soviet domestic priorities', which made it vital to avoid foreign military intervention to bail out hardline regimes facing non-violent protests from their own citizens but did not inevitably imply a conscious move towards jettisoning communist rule in Eastern Europe. Rather, by 'placing [the socialist camp] on a much sounder footing than in the past, [h]e hoped to preserve the integrity of the Warsaw Pact and other multilateral institutions and to create favorable conditions in Eastern Europe for a liberalised form of Communism'.⁵¹ Thus, 'abandonment' is, in our opinion, misplaced. What can be said is that Gorbachev and his foreign policy advisers had no strategic plan or tactical programme in 1989 beyond averting unrest and

bloodshed, but on the contrary ‘were forced to adjust to the accelerating pace of events, trying to put a brave face on a rather sorry business’.⁵² Perhaps Buckley best sums up Gorbachev’s role by suggesting that he was a ‘facilitator, trigger, approver, persuader and ... [ultimately] essential enabler of revolutions in Eastern Europe’.

Processes

While the emergence of dissident movements in the 1970s was one of the long-term causes of the fall of communism, it is difficult to see how they had much of a direct impact on the course of events in 1989, with the possible exception of Czechoslovakia, where Havel became president at the end of that year. In practice dissident movements were too small and too unrepresentative of the wider population, confining their activities to modest circles of a few thousand people at best, and being concentrated by and large in a few cities, notably Prague, Warsaw, East Berlin or Budapest.⁵³ They were also hopelessly divided. Whereas some set out to renew the communist system, not overthrow it, others sought a complete break with Soviet hegemony in order to return their country to its supposed (Central) European heritage. And while some called for dialogue with reform-minded party officials and intellectuals, others rejected politics altogether on the grounds that any kind of negotiation or jostling for power would corrupt the purity of their cause. The latter position eventually won out, for, as the Czech dissident and Charter 77 signatory Jan Urban later wrote, in the winter of 1989–90 ‘Politics were disregarded as a normal way of behaviour’ and ‘three quarters of people supporting [the opposition] Civic Forum [movement] did not want it to become a political party’.⁵⁴

As noted above, the ‘Gorbachev factor’ is also important for understanding the background to 1989, but perhaps has even less to tell us about how the process of change unfolded in the revolutionary year itself. Undoubtedly Gorbachev’s biggest contribution was that he ruled out Soviet military intervention in hardline regimes like the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania, as well as in countries showing liberalising tendencies like Poland and Hungary.⁵⁵ However, as László Borhi shows in his contribution to this volume ([chapter 6](#)), the Soviet leaders’ pronouncements on other matters, such as whether the East European states should stay in the Warsaw Pact – a crucial issue in 1989 – were more vague and failed to provide a concrete guide to action. Furthermore, by this stage the West valued its relationship with Gorbachev more than anything else and did not wish to provoke a confrontation with the USSR at a crucial stage in negotiations over arms reductions and detente. For this reason it urged gradual constitutional reform rather than sudden revolutionary change in Eastern Europe in 1989.

In other words, the factors determining the course of events in 1989 have to be sought beyond the Soviet Union and the West, even if developments up to the autumn might still be ‘interpreted within the framework of *perestroika*’, as James Krapfl argues in his afterword ([chapter 14](#)). By and large what governed the pace and tempo thereafter were internal factors specific to each individual country, although the influence of television and other forms of mass communication also ensured that there were often immediate knock-on effects of change in one country for neighbouring regimes. This in turn raises the question whether the East European rulers themselves, in particular reformists within the respective communist parties and their internal political opponents, had any influence on the final outcome. In what sense were they passive observers of the process of change, or conversely, active agents?

It is commonly agreed that Poland led the way in 1989. Yet Poland was also unique because it was the only country that had a mass opposition – the banned Solidarity trade union – with a clear mandate ‘from below’ to initiate change, and an independent institution – the Catholic Church – which was powerful enough to act as a mediator. Large-scale strikes in August 1988 compelled the regime to initiate Round Table talks with the opposition which began in February 1989 and ended two months later with an agreement to lift the ban on Solidarity and stage semi-free elections. In June, Solidarity won an overwhelming victory, securing 99 out of 100 seats in the Senate and all 161 seats which were up for grabs in the lower house, or Sejm. Cynicism and naked opportunism certainly had a part to play in bringing the communist and opposition elites together and preventing them from falling out later, but so too did an evolution towards hard-headed political realism, as Tom Junes demonstrates in his contribution to the volume ([chapter 5](#)). For leading Solidarity activist Adam Michnik, writing in the *Gazeta Wyborcza* (*Election Gazette*) on 3 July 1989, both sides had come to recognise that ‘only a combining of leaders ... offered favourable odds for finding an adequate solution to the economic reconstruction of the country’.⁵⁶ Already in early 1989 the government of Mieczysław Rakowski had unsentimentally broken with one of the central tenets of the command economy by introducing a new law allowing private citizens to buy state-owned assets, another first for a communist country alongside its recognition of the right to strike. And yet there were no plans to leave the Warsaw Pact, and when in August 1989 Tadeusz Mazowiecki became the first non-communist prime minister anywhere in the Soviet bloc since 1948, he headed a government in which the politically significant posts of interior and defence minister were still held by members of the former ruling Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR).⁵⁷

In Hungary the organised political opposition and the Church played a less significant role in bringing communist rule to an end. Instead, as

Borhi shows, it was the regime that wanted radically to alter the country's relationship with the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact and thereby restore national sovereignty. A key moment came in January 1989 when Imre Pozsgay, a leading radical reformist inside the Politburo, described the events of October 1956 in Hungary as a 'popular uprising' rather than a 'counter-revolution' during a broadcast radio interview. This was followed, on 2 May 1989, by the first steps towards dismantling the old border fences between Hungary and Austria, a move which prime minister Miklós Németh had already discussed with Gorbachev in Moscow in March, successfully arguing that it would cost too much money to replace the obsolete barriers with more up-to-date ones.⁵⁸ By now opposition parties had in effect been legalised and Round Table talks were about to begin, but the ruling party itself was still forcing the pace, announcing on 1 June that the Hungarian leader in 1956, Imre Nagy, had been wrongly convicted and executed and arranging for his reburial with full state honours on 16 June. On 19 August Pozsgay, Otto von Habsburg, the Bavarian politician/Austro-Hungarian crown prince, and local opposition activists organised a 'Pan-European picnic' in the western Hungarian town of Sopron, during which several hundred East Germans seized the opportunity to cross the border into Austria. With more and more would-be GDR emigrants arriving each day, the Hungarian regime finally announced on the night of 10–11 September that its frontier with Austria was officially open, a clear breach of its Warsaw Pact obligations.

All the evidence suggests that these initiatives came from the reform communists themselves; recent research has quashed speculation that the Hungarian government may have been bribed by the West Germans to open the border. In fact, the West Germans hinted that they might offer new loans in late August 1989, but the Hungarians refused to accept in principle or to discuss terms until after the refugee crisis had been resolved, Németh repeating several times that 'Hungary will not trade humans for money' [*Ungarn verkauft keine Menschen*].⁵⁹ The real turning point for Hungarian communism itself came on 7 October 1989, when the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSzMP) changed its name to the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP). Later that month the parliament formally approved legislation allowing for multi-party elections and a directly elected president, and the People's Republic of Hungary was symbolically renamed the Republic of Hungary.

'Emigration', Timothy Garton Ash once wrote, 'is the German form of revolution'.⁶⁰ By August–September 1989 the GDR faced a growing internal crisis caused by the flight of thousands of its citizens, especially young students and professionals, through the open Hungarian border to Austria. When the East German government responded to the events of 11 September by seeking to prevent any more of its citizens from travelling

to Hungary via Czechoslovakia and Poland, the result was a series of embassy occupations in Prague and Warsaw and a humiliating climb-down in the face of international pressure. The embassy occupiers were ferried in sealed trains across the GDR to West Germany, where they were greeted as heroes. But in many ways what happened next was a conscious effort on the part of the East German opposition to stop history from repeating itself. New political groups like *Neues Forum* (New Forum) and *Demokratie Jetzt!* (Democracy Now!) thus formed in the autumn of 1989 with the express goal of remaining in the GDR and helping to stage a genuine peaceful revolution there. 'Wir bleiben hier' (We are staying here) and 'Wir sind das Volk' (We are the people) were the slogans of the Monday demonstrations which began in Leipzig in early September, gathered in momentum on 2 and 9 October and ended with a half million-strong protest in East Berlin on 4 November. Only after the Berlin Wall fell on 9 November did this change to 'Wir sind ein Volk' (We are one people), a belated but powerful reference to the idea of German unity which in turn signalled the beginning of the end for the GDR opposition's programme of maintaining a separate East German state with its 'own ... form of democracy'.⁶¹

Whereas in East Germany opposition groups were formed prior to the toppling of the regime, in Bulgaria these events took place in reverse order. On 10 November the longest-serving communist dictator in Eastern Europe, Todor Zhivkov, was overthrown in a 'palace coup' and replaced by foreign minister Petar Mladenov. The latter began the task of changing the nature of the party's monopoly of power and reversing its discriminatory policies towards Muslims and ethnic Turks in face of a rapidly disintegrating economy and (after 10 November) popular rallies in the capital in favour of more fundamental political change. By contrast the opposition Union of Democratic Forces was only formed on 7 December and was unable to present itself either as a confident assertive voice for radical reform in the Round Table negotiations of early 1990 or as a government-in-waiting capable of defeating the former communists – now operating under the name Bulgarian Socialist Party – in the elections held in June. The result was similar in many ways to the experience of the Soviet Union after 1991: the collapse of central authority and one-party rule did not lead to a transfer of power to the people or 'consumers', but left it in the hands of corrupt managers and individual entrepreneurs (often former communists) looking to make a killing from the sale or manipulation of state assets. The latter now attempted to run the economy without the controlling influence of the party bureaucracy, which had previously restricted the scope for corruption and self-enrichment out of fear of the social consequences of too much overt inequality. Small wonder, then, that in the decade that followed many Bulgarians looked back on the events

of 1989 as a thwarted attempt at revolution and sought to compensate for this by involving themselves in symbolic, but ultimately unsatisfying staged demonstrations of people's power, as Nikolai Vukov argues in his contribution to this volume ([chapter 13](#)).

Developments also came late in Czechoslovakia, where communist leaders had an uncompromising hardline reputation. It was not until 17 November that student demonstrations in Prague sparked what was soon to become known as the 'Velvet Revolution'. In the preceding weeks the implosion of the communist regimes in neighbouring Poland and Hungary, the exodus of East German refugees via Prague and most crucially the breaching of the Berlin Wall, had galvanised large numbers of Czechs and Slovaks. Police brutality had already aroused much indignation in January 1989 when crowds marking the twentieth anniversary of the self-immolation of student Jan Palach had been forcibly dispersed. However, the violent suppression of the 17 November demonstration by special security forces proved to be the turning point when the old regime finally began to lose its grip on power. Disgusted by this spectacle, hundreds of thousands of citizens took to the streets, more or less occupied the massive Wenceslaus Square and roared their acclamation as Havel and Alexander Dubček, the reformist communist leader of the Prague Spring in 1968, addressed the crowds. These mass demonstrations, almost entirely peaceful, became a defining characteristic of the 'Velvet Revolution'. Within two days of the student march, former Chartists and other diverse oppositionists created *Občanské fórum* (Civic Forum) as an umbrella body to orchestrate the popular movement and negotiate with the collapsing, but tenacious, communist authorities. After several days of tense talks, fierce disagreements over the composition of a new cabinet and a two-hour general strike on 27 November, a 'Government of National Understanding' was sworn in on 10 December by president Husák who thereafter immediately resigned to be replaced by Havel. It is essential to recognise, however, that while the world focused on the unfolding drama in Prague, local and regional 'revolutions' were occurring throughout the republic, notably in Bratislava where on 19 November Slovak activists created *Verejnosť proti násiliu* (Public against Violence), which became the Slovak equivalent of 'Civic Forum'.⁶² In face of these concerted domestic buffetings, the turmoil in other socialist states and Soviet non-intervention, the Czechoslovak communist regime crumbled within a month.

Romania was the only country to experience wide-scale violence in the revolutions of 1989; officially, 1,104 people were killed and 3,352 injured.⁶³ Nicolae Ceaușescu's personalised and arbitrary dictatorship, commonly regarded as the most brutal and punitive in Eastern Europe, was no doubt one of the main reasons for this sad outcome. A measure of the kind of regime he ran is the fact that towards the end of 1989 he

had managed to pay off all of Romania's overseas debts, although, as Ivan T. Berend argues, this was achieved only 'by cutting domestic consumption drastically', leading to bare shelves in shops, unheated homes and regular electricity cuts.⁶⁴ The cradle of the revolution was the western town of Timișoara, where, in mid-December, the threatened eviction of a popular ethnic Hungarian pastor, László Tőkés, brought many of his throng out onto the streets in his defence. With no immediate solution to the problem, the number of protesters soon swelled and their demands became more politicised, their actions more aggressive. Pitched battles with Ceaușescu's hated security forces, the *securitate*, and army units ensued, culminating on 17 December in a bloody carnage which claimed the lives of over sixty unarmed civilians. However, three days later the sheer volume of demonstrators, now bolstered by thousands of factory workers, compelled army units to withdraw to barracks, although the overall situation remained confused and volatile. The protests then spread throughout the country, often accompanied by violence and the desecration of despised communist artefacts.

In Bucharest, Ceaușescu, bizarrely confident of his abiding support, attempted to quell the chaos by addressing a mass crowd on 21 December. His televised speech to an eerily mute, but tense, audience showed the nation, and on-looking colleagues, his frailty, perplexity and fallibility. Events moved very fast thereafter. Bloody clashes in the capital later the same day resulted in more civilian deaths and on the morning of 22 December the unimaginable happened: army, and to a lesser extent *securitate*, forces fraternised with the people, the regime began to implode and Ceaușescu, together with his wife Elena, hastily fled the Central Committee building by helicopter after having been booed and cat-whistled from the balcony by a now emboldened multitude. The couple were eventually tracked down, given a kangaroo trial and peremptorily shot on Christmas day. Meanwhile, a self-proclaimed National Salvation Front, headed by an ex-communist Ion Iliescu, sought to control the near anarchic situation and stamp its authority over revolutionary excesses. As Kevin Adamson and Sergiu Florean discuss in their chapter, one of the Front's prime goals in the days and weeks that followed was to construct a usable discursive version of the 'revolution' to legitimise its assumption of power. It is to the post-1989 period that we shall now turn.

Outcomes

With the revolutions of 1989 Eastern Europe, and indeed the world, marched bravely and expectantly into a new era. The hopes and aspirations of millions of hitherto oppressed people for political 'freedom' and the 'good life' were exceedingly high. Yet over time the demise of communism

came to mean different things to different people. For the western left it reinforced a tendency, already evident since the late 1970s, towards conservatism. Defending the welfare state, government spending on health and education and the benefits of a 'mixed economy' against the rival claims of the Thatcherite/Reaganite new right and their 1990s successors became their main concern. Conservatism was also evident in left-wing approaches to foreign affairs, and especially militant opposition to policies of 'liberal interventionism' in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. But after 1989 the western left largely ceased to offer a radical critique, or replacement for capitalism. Instead free market radicals were able to set the agenda – including the agenda for reforming capitalism. Or as the sociologist Anthony Giddens, a leading influence on Tony Blair and New Labour in Britain, put it, the right was now able to steal the old Marxist left's clothes, in particular its rejection of tradition and its view that 'History was there to be seized hold of, to be moulded for human purposes'. In his view, a new radical political alternative to the right's mantra of the free market would have to come from the centre, not the left.⁶⁵

In Eastern Europe, by contrast, which is our main area of interest, politics after 1989 were characterised less by a realignment of 'left', 'right' and 'centre', and more by personalised rivalries and feuds, some bitter, among hitherto united 'dissidents' and 'revolutionaries'.⁶⁶ The tensions between the philosopher-playwright Havel and the man who served under him as Czech prime minister between 1992 and 1997, the neo-liberal economist and former Civic Forum member Václav Klaus, would be one example among many. The apparent unity of 1989, and the notion of a joint effort to overthrow Soviet hegemony and restore a common Central European homeland, was also not enough to hold together multi-national states like Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, both of which had existed since 1918. The former broke up peacefully in 1992–93, the later very violently in 1991–95. More generally the transition from the central components of communist rule – the one-party dictatorship, the totalising quest for control over socio-cultural processes, the highly statist and centralised economies, and, to a lesser extent, perceived Soviet domination – towards more democratic, constitutional, sovereign and market-oriented politics was never going to be easy, especially in situations where old ethnic tensions and national conflicts re-emerged after decades of being hidden, frozen beneath the ground of 'normalised' communist rule. History books had to be re-written to overcome the distortions of Marxism-Leninism, but the very act of rewriting history, far from being a healing process, often opened up old wounds. Who, for instance, could now legitimately claim to have been a victim of the Stalinist terror of the late 1940s and early 1950s? Which ethnic groups had really been persecuted, or had had their histories suppressed, over four decades of communist rule? And who should have

access to the domestic records of former communist parties and/or state security services?⁶⁷

At the same time, knowledge and practical understanding of the concepts that underlay the revolutions – democracy, multi-party politics, human rights, market economies, national sovereignty – were often poorly embedded in mass consciousness, especially in countries ‘where for so long the habits of participation in politics ha[d] been stifled’.⁶⁸ Although much of the old regime was swept away, former communists sometimes benefited both from internal rifts among their opponents and from a general cynicism about all political programmes, and were even elected back into power in Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria in the years 1993–94, albeit in each case for one term of office only. To say that these were still communist parties would be stretching the definition too far, however. Some ex-communists adapted to capitalism and parliamentary democracy with little ideological difficulty. As representatives of the former regime they had an insider’s knowledge of why the old system did not work, and some were able to put their expertise to use for personal, as well as political gain. The exception was the GDR, where change, and elite turnover, was even more rapid as a result of immediate absorption into the EC through currency and political reunification with West Germany in July–October 1990. The process was not pain-free by any means, but unemployed East German workers were partly cushioned by (West) Germany’s own relatively generous welfare system. Even so, a sizeable minority of East Germans showed their opposition to the effects of reunification, or their continued regret that 1989 had brought capitalism rather than a reformed but still recognisable GDR, by voting for the renamed communist party, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and its successor after 2007, *Die Linke* (The Left).

The economic position of other former communist countries was far more rocky, especially in the early 1990s. By 1992, national income per capita across Central and Eastern Europe was only 77 per cent of what it had been in 1989. Worst hit was Romania, where GDP fell to a mere 28 per cent of the level reached in the last year of Ceaușescu’s regime; the figures for Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland were 77, 79, 81 and 83 per cent respectively. The transition to capitalism also saw a significant increase in social inequalities. Thus between 1989 and 1995 the percentage of people living in relative poverty (those earning under 35–45 per cent of the average wage) rose from 14 to 54 per cent in Bulgaria, from 4 to 25 per cent in the Czech Republic, from 10 to 30 per cent in Hungary, from 25 to 44 per cent in Poland and from 34 to 52 per cent in Romania. Admittedly, in the decade 1993 to 2003 all of the East European states experienced improvements in consumption rates and living standards, and by 2005, the year after they entered the EU, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland were achieving annual growth rates of 4.9, 4.5 and 3.7 per cent respectively,

compared to an average of only 1.6 per cent growth in the fifteen older EU member-states.⁶⁹ Yet even in 2012 the erstwhile communist countries still lagged well behind their western neighbours in terms of GDP per head, and it could easily take several more decades before they finally catch up.⁷⁰ In this sense William Outhwaite may well be right when he argues, following Robin Okey, that the era of post-communist transition will only really be over when Eastern Europe is ‘integrated *with*, not *into*’ the European Union.⁷¹

In addition to economic difficulties, there was also a profound moral void and lack of unity in post-communist societies. ‘Politics as usual’, in the words of Judt, ‘had been replaced by “anti-politics”’, giving rise to a ‘post-political world, shorn of ethical meaning and historical narrative’.⁷² This may help to explain the subsequent disillusionment, sense of ‘dashed hopes’, even the notion that 1989 was a fix-up between old elites, as communists and left-leaning dissidents allegedly conspired to preserve their own vested political interests and to deprive the people of a true voice. As Artur Lipiński shows in [chapter 12](#) in this volume, in the case of Poland right-wing discourses about 1989 not only became a way of distinguishing conservative/anti-communist from leftist/social democrat positions, but also of staking out differences within the right-wing camp and jockeying for position as the leading anti-communist party. The result was to reinforce a widespread scepticism towards political pacts and coalition bargaining, rooted in a critical, and in some cases wholly negative view of the Round Table negotiations which brought communist rule to an end in Poland in 1989. For some right-wing Poles, the Round Table negotiations were skilfully directed by the opposition in the teeth of communist backtracking and dirty tricks, while for others the opposition itself had ‘betrayed’ the revolution by allowing the communists to dictate not only the pace of events but also the eventual outcome. In all of these discourses the centrist communist reformers were painted in very black terms, as tricksters, while the revolution itself was denigrated into something not worthy of the name, as a fix or a fraud, or – as Vukov also shows in the Bulgarian case – as something which allegedly ‘never happened’.⁷³

Any reassessment of the outcomes of 1989 must, of course, take into account these attempts to challenge discursively the more immediate ‘triumphalist’ readings of the collapse of communism. The absence of violence (except in Romania) and of sudden cataclysmic change in the manner of 1789 or 1917 has also been used by some to suggest that the peaceful overthrow of the East European regimes in 1989 did not meet all the criteria necessary for a fully fledged revolution. This, for instance, was the position of Mitterrand in the speech quoted at the beginning of this chapter, in which he seemed to argue that a new language was required to understand ‘a change in depth’ which was not a result of ‘a war or a

bloody revolution'; and by Garton Ash when he coined the term 'refolution' as an alternative to 'revolution'. With equal force, those taking an extra-European or global perspective have questioned whether there was a 'revolution' in international affairs, noting that for all the emphasis on the *annus mirabilis* of 1989, 'a fundamental rupture in world order does not appear to have taken place'.⁷⁴ None the less, in our view there is still a strong case for arguing that in Central and Eastern Europe, the events of 1989 ushered in truly revolutionary, and broadly popular, political, economic and social change towards democratic, pluralistic and multi-party polities and free market (or regulated) capitalist economies.⁷⁵ Less far-reaching, but significant, elite turnover affected state ministries, the security services, the judiciary and the police. Civil society became an established reality rather than an embryonic potentiality. The health and educational systems were overhauled, and major innovations occurred in the mass media, reducing direct state intervention and ensuring freedom of information, although recent legislative and constitutional changes in Hungary have led internal and external critics to raise concerns about a new spirit of illiberalism. In international relations, the revolutions resulted in the complete withdrawal of all Soviet forces from the GDR, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the last troops leaving eastern Germany in September 1994, the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and Comecon, and thus the eclipse of Soviet hegemony in the area.⁷⁶ This opened the possibility of a 'return to Europe' and within fifteen years most East European countries had become members of NATO and the EU and were part of the global economy. For millions of East Europeans these were remarkable achievements.

Moreover, when considering who were the key actors in 1989, we would argue that this was a revolution made not just by the people demanding freedom to live outside politics, and not just by those who rejected, or were deeply sceptical, towards Marxism and other 'grand narratives', but also by pragmatic centrist reformists from the old regime. Gorbachev was one of them but there were others – the Hungarian communists who took the decision to dismantle the old Cold War frontier with Austria, the Polish regime of Wojciech Jaruzelski which led the PZPR into an historic power-sharing agreement with the opposition Solidarity movement in August 1989, even Modrow in the GDR, who developed a reputation as a reformer from his base as SED first secretary in Dresden. It was they who saw most clearly that the old system could not survive in its current form and that the time for change had come. The events of 1989 were the unintended outcome of their commitment to a more open, pluralistic non-bureaucratic form of Marxism, shorn of every last vestige of Stalinism and more receptive to reforms being instigated in the USSR, as much as it was a reflection of popular and dissident demands for an end to four decades of communist tyranny and Soviet overlordship.

Notes

- 1 P. Roth, *American Pastoral* (London, 1997), p. 87. Also cited in S. Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), p. 4.
- 2 Cited in S. B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 238.
- 3 E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London, 1994), pp. 2–3; F. Bozo, *Mitterrand, the End of the Cold War, and German Unification*, trans. S. Emanuel (New York and Oxford, 2009) [2005], pp. 389–90.
- 4 On the universal significance of 1989, see G. Lawson, C. Armbruster and M. Cox (eds), *The Global 1989: Continuity and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge, 2010). The most recent broader overview is V. Tismaneanu and B. Iacob (eds), *The End and the Beginning: The Revolutions of 1989 and the Resurgence of History* (Budapest, 2012).
- 5 While in what follows we focus mainly on works by historians, political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists have also contributed extensively to the field. See, for example, R. Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* (London, 1990); S. P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, 1991); K. Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, 1996); V. Bunce, *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State* (Cambridge, 1999); V. Tismaneanu (ed.), *The Revolutions of 1989* (London, 1999); K. Kumar, *1989: Revolutionary Ideas and Ideals* (Minneapolis, 2001); J. Foran, D. Lane and A. Zivkovic (eds), *Revolution in the Making of the Modern World: Social Identities, Globalization and Modernity* (London, 2007).
- 6 Arguably, the scholar most associated with this line of argument is T. Garton Ash, *We the People: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague* (London, 1990).
- 7 S. Kotkin, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York, 2009), p. xiv.
- 8 V. Tismaneanu, 'Introduction', in Tismaneanu (ed.), *The Revolutions of 1989*, p. 8. For contrasting assessments of Gorbachev's role, see K. Dawisha, *Eastern Europe, Gorbachev and Reform: The Great Challenge* (Cambridge, 1990); A. Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford, 1996); M. Kramer, 'The Demise of the Soviet Bloc', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 83, no. 4 (2011), pp. 788–854; and the chapters by Mary Buckley and Peter Grieder in this volume.
- 9 C. Pleshakov, *There Is No Freedom without Bread! 1989 and the Civil War That Brought Down Communism* (New York, 2009), p. 236.
- 10 R. Okey, *The Demise of Communist East Europe: 1989 in Context* (London, 2004).
- 11 R. V. Daniels, 'The Anti-Communist Revolutions in the Soviet Union

and Eastern Europe, 1989 to 1991', in D. Parker (ed.), *Revolutions and the Revolutionary Tradition in the West, 1560–1991* (London, 2000), pp. 202–24 (here p. 221).

- 12 One example would be the attempt by the former East German historian and PDS politician Werner Bramke to rehabilitate the idea of peaceful, democratic revolution through drawing parallels between 1918–19 and 1989 in Leipzig. See W. Bramke, *Leipzig in der Revolution von 1918/19* (Leipzig, 2009), esp. p. 15.
- 13 Two powerful collections of essays are especially important in this respect: A. Roberts and T. Garton Ash (eds), *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-Violent Action from Gandhi to the Present* (Oxford, 2009); and M. Sabrow (ed.), *1989 und die Rolle der Gewalt* (Göttingen, 2012). See also M. Conway and R. Gerwarth, 'Revolution and Counter-Revolution', in D. Bloxham and R. Gerwarth (eds), *Political Violence in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 140–75 (here esp. p. 169).
- 14 C. Armbruster, 'One Bright Moment in an Age of War, Genocide and Terror? On the Revolutions of 1989', in Lawson et al. (eds), *The Global 1989*, pp. 201–18 (here esp. p. 202). The concept of 'self-limiting revolutions' comes from the Polish sociologist and Solidarity counsellor Jadwiga Staniszkis – see J. Staniszkis, *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution*, ed. J. T. Gross (Princeton, 1984). On 'negotiated revolutions' more broadly, see G. Lawson, *Negotiated Revolutions: The Czech Republic, South Africa and Chile* (London, 2005); C. Armbruster, *The Quality of Democracy in Europe: Soviet Illegitimacy and the Negotiated Revolutions of 1989* (New York, 2008).
- 15 Okey, *The Demise of Communist East Europe*, p. ix.
- 16 See esp. M. Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven and London, 2005). The phrase 'downfall in stages' was used more specifically in the East German context by A. Mitter and S. Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten: Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR-Geschichte* (Munich, 1993).
- 17 See for example C. S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, 1997); and the recent set of essays on the international dimensions of 1989 edited by J. A. Engel, *The Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989* (Oxford, 2009).
- 18 V. Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989: The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (London, 2009), esp. pp. 258–61 and 321–3; A. Oplatka, *Der erste Riss in der Mauer: September 1989 – Ungarn öffnet die Grenze* (Vienna, 2009).
- 19 Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, pp. 486, 492 and 496.
- 20 I. T. Berend, *From the Soviet Bloc to the European Union: The Economic and Social Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe since 1973* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 256.
- 21 R. Vinen, *A History in Fragments: Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London, 2000), p. 467.

- 22 T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London, 2005), pp. 592 and 582. For more detail on the proposed economic reforms in Czechoslovakia, see M. Myant, *The Czechoslovak Economy 1948–1988: The Battle for Economic Reform* (Cambridge, 1989).
- 23 Vinen, *A History in Fragments*, p. 470.
- 24 E. Hobsbawm, K. Gill and T. Benn, *The Forward March of Labour Halted?*, ed. M. Jacques and F. Mulhearn (London, 1981); A. Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism*, trans. Mike Sonenscher (London, 1982) [French orig. 1980].
- 25 Judt, *Postwar*, p. 582.
- 26 M. Kramer, 'The Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact and the Polish Crisis of 1980–1981', in L. Trapenier, S. Domaradzki and J. Stanke (eds), *The Solidarity Movement and Perspectives on the Last Decade of the Cold War* (Kraków, 2010), pp. 27–66 (here esp. pp. 44–5).
- 27 R. Pearson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 100.
- 28 A. Westad, 'Conclusion: Was There a Global 1989?', in Lawson et al. (eds), *The Global 1989*, pp. 271–81 (here pp. 272–4).
- 29 Remarks made by Honecker to Brezhnev during a meeting in the Crimea on 3 August 1981, cited in Kramer, 'The Soviet Union', p. 33.
- 30 The key works here are D. C. Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton, 2001); Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, pp. 148–75; and Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*, passim. See also W. Templin, 'Das Helsinki-Abkommen', in Martin Sabrow (ed.), *Erinnerungsorte der DDR* (Munich, 2009), pp. 460–5.
- 31 Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, pp. 167–86; Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*, pp. 67–72 and 125; Judt, *Postwar*, p. 575; D. Deletant, 'Romania, 1945–89: Resistance, Protest and Dissent', in K. McDermott and M. Stibbe (eds), *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 81–99 (here pp. 91–3).
- 32 Judt, *Postwar*, p. 569. The most recent, and best, book on Charter 77 is J. Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism* (Cambridge: MA, 2012). See also H. G. Skilling, *Charter 77 and Human Rights in Czechoslovakia* (London, 1981).
- 33 Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*, p. 68.
- 34 M. Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949–1989* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 218–20.
- 35 Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, p. 284.
- 36 H. Young, *One of Us: A Biography of Margaret Thatcher*, new edn (London, 1990) [1989], pp. 169, 185, 257 and 389.
- 37 J. Kuczynski, *Ein hoffnungsloser Fall von Optimismus? Memoiren 1989–1994*, 2nd edn (Berlin, 1995), pp. 319–20.

- 38 Judt, *Postwar*, pp. 576 and 602.
- 39 Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, pp. 187–8. See also D. Eviatar (on behalf of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee), *Violations of the Helsinki Accords: East Germany. A Report Prepared for the Helsinki Review Conference, Vienna, November 1986* (New York and Washington, DC, 1986), p. 27. This report quotes various sources suggesting that there were between 7,000 and 10,000 political prisoners in the GDR in 1985, roughly half of whom had ended up in jail ‘because they applied to emigrate or attempted to emigrate without permission’. From 1963 around 1,000 political prisoners were freed and ‘expelled’ to West Germany each year, rising to 2,247 in 1984 and 2,700 in 1985, usually in exchange for hard currency (p. 29).
- 40 C. S. Maier, ‘Civil Resistance and Civil Society: Lessons from the Collapse of the German Democratic Republic in 1989’, in Roberts and Garton Ash (eds), *Civil Resistance and Power Politics*, pp. 260–76 (here p. 269).
- 41 V. Havel, ‘The Power of the Powerless’, in V. Havel et al., *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. by J. Keane (London, 1985), pp. 23–96. The quotations in this and the next paragraph are at pp. 36–9.
- 42 P. Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton, 2002), p. 150. On gay rights and demands for greater sexual freedoms, see J. McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge, 2011). It should be noted, however, that not all gay rights activism was explicitly oppositional.
- 43 Vinen, *A History in Fragments*, p. 497.
- 44 These ideas are based on M. Lewin, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon: A Historical Interpretation* (London, 1988), pp. 80–2. See also Peter Grieder’s chapter in this volume.
- 45 The ‘Brezhnev doctrine’, first propounded in autumn 1968, represented the Soviet leaders’ self-appointed right to intervene to defend socialism in any part of the Soviet bloc wherever it was deemed to be under threat. According to one of Gorbachev’s wittier aides, it was replaced in 1989 by the ‘Sinatra doctrine’, a reference to the crooner’s classic ‘My Way’.
- 46 J. Lévesque, *The Enigma of 1989: The USSR and the Liberation of Eastern Europe* (Berkeley, 1997), p. 3.
- 47 Lévesque, *The Enigma of 1989*, pp. 28–30.
- 48 Judt, *Postwar*, pp. 632–3.
- 49 J. Haslam, *Russia’s Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven, 2011), pp. 376, 388 and 399.
- 50 Lévesque, *The Enigma of 1989*, p. 51.
- 51 Kramer, ‘The Demise of the Soviet Bloc’, pp. 853, 838 and 849–50.
- 52 A. Grachev, *Gorbachev’s Gamble: Soviet Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 128.

- 53 In June 1989 the East German Stasi reported that there were only around 2,500 'hostile, oppositional or other negative forces' in the GDR. Of these 600 were regarded as 'leaders' and a mere 60 as 'fanatical ... unteachable enemies of socialism'. Cited in T. Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (London, 1993), p. 202. Likewise in Bulgaria the number of dissidents in early 1989 was 'scarcely above 1,000'. See G. Dalos, *Der Vorhang geht auf: Das Ende der Diktaturen in Osteuropa* (Munich, 2009), p. 160.
- 54 J. Urban, 'Czechoslovakia: The Power and Politics of Humiliation', in G. Prins (ed.), *Spring in Winter: The 1989 Revolutions* (Manchester, 1990), pp. 99–136 (here p. 124).
- 55 This is also the chief point made by Kramer, 'The Demise of the Soviet Bloc', p. 789, who notes that Gorbachev had already secretly persuaded the CPSU Politburo in the spring of 1989 that there would be no military interference in Eastern Europe 'no matter what happened to the Communist regimes there'. The Soviet leader even stuck to this principle in December 1989, when the West indicated that they would look favourably on any Soviet moves to intervene against the Ceauşescu regime in Romania (p. 851).
- 56 Dalos, *Der Vorhang geht auf*, pp. 53–4.
- 57 Dalos, *Der Vorhang geht auf*, pp. 55, 58.
- 58 Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989*, pp. 258–9.
- 59 Oplatka, *Der erste Riss*, pp. 196–7; Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989*, pp. 322–3. But see also Kramer, 'The Demise of the Soviet Bloc', p. 833, who continues to suggest that there was a 'tacit exchange' or 'bargain' in August 1989 whereby the Hungarians agreed to let the East German refugees travel to the FRG via Austria and in return 'West German leaders promised to give Hungary financial support for its democratization and market reforms and to encourage other Western countries to do the same'.
- 60 T. Garton Ash, *Und willst du nicht mein Bruder sein ...: Die DDR heute* (Hamburg, 1981), p. 11.
- 61 J. Reich, 'Reflections on Becoming an East German Dissident, on Losing the Wall and a Country', in Prins (ed.), *Spring in Winter*, pp. 65–97 (here p. 92). See also K. Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (Oxford, 1994), esp. pp. 20–2, 33–4 and 87; and Maier, 'Civil Resistance and Civil Society', esp. pp. 262–3.
- 62 On developments outside of Prague, see J. Krapfl, 'Revolution and Revolt against Revolution: Czechoslovakia, 1989', in McDermott and Stibbe (eds), *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe*, pp. 175–94; and in far greater detail, J. Krapfl, *Revolúcia s ľudskou tvárou: Politika, kultúra a spoločnosť v Československu po 17. novembri 1989* (Bratislava, 2009).
- 63 P. Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989* (Ithaca,

2005), p. 97. Our summary of events in Romania is based on this volume, pp. 53–143.

- 64 Berend, *From the Soviet Bloc to the European Union*, p. 33.
- 65 A. Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 1–2 and *passim*. For a broader view, see also W. Outhwaite, ‘What Is Left after 1989?’, in Lawson et al. (eds.), *The Global 1989*, pp. 76–93 (esp. pp. 86–9).
- 66 Maier, ‘Civil Resistance and Civil Society’, pp. 272–3.
- 67 Some of these issues are implicitly addressed in K. McDermott and M. Stibbe (eds), *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression* (Manchester, 2010).
- 68 Urban, ‘Czechoslovakia’, p. 122.
- 69 All of the figures in this paragraph can be found in Berend, *From the Soviet Bloc to the European Union*, pp. 77, 189 and 259–60.
- 70 The Czech Republic was predicted to achieve an estimated GDP per head of \$21,290 in 2012, compared to \$21,370 in Portugal, \$33,180 in Spain and \$36,100 in Italy. Slovakia, Hungary and Poland were forecast \$18,090, \$14,500 and \$14,250 respectively, and Romania and Bulgaria \$8,700 and \$7,870 respectively, compared to \$17,710 for Greece. The best predicted result for a former communist country was Slovenia with \$24,140. Figures in The Economist, *The World in 2012* (London, 2012), pp. 106–8.
- 71 Outhwaite, ‘What Is Left after 1989?’, p. 92.
- 72 T. Judt with T. Snyder, *Thinking the Twentieth Century* (London, 2012), p. 248.
- 73 For similar discourses in post-communist Czechoslovakia, which cast ‘the revolution as nothing but a conspiracy between Havel and the Communists’, see Krapfl, ‘Revolution and Revolt against Revolution’, pp. 187–9.
- 74 G. Lawson, ‘Introduction: The “What”, “When” and “Where” of the Global 1989’, in Lawson et al. (eds), *The Global 1989*, pp. 1–20 (here p. 19).
- 75 Here we follow in particular the line taken by L. Holmes, *Post-Communism: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 130–1.
- 76 Kramer, ‘The Demise of the Soviet Bloc’, p. 848.

Part I

The historical longue durée

2

Echoes and precedents: 1989 in historical perspective

Robin Okey

The East European revolutions of 1989 offer a host of possibilities for enquiry. For political scientists they have meant the creation of new polities, where matters like rational choice or path dependency theory can be tested or the merits of alternative constitutional arrangements assessed. Economists have debated the permutations of 'Big Bang' or more gradualist schemes for the transition from a communist to a capitalist order. Sociologists have raised questions of the nature of the social system which was displaced, the new ways in which social outcomes previously sought through the state might come about and the problems the new freedoms brought along with the opportunities.

A full review of any of these themes would produce a cluttered text, besides exceeding the competence of a historian like myself. Historians have written less on this contemporary event at the fringe of their discipline.¹ Yet there is surely a historical dimension to be explored. The year 1989 was already heralded at the time as one of the great dates on which history turns. Ralf Dahrendorf's *Reflections on the Revolutions in Europe* (1990) deliberately evoked Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), at the start of the modern epoch. In that period the large majority of peoples of East Central and South East Europe (hereafter 'our region') remained non-dominant groups in a zone of empire and serfdom which had lagged increasingly behind the West of the continent since the economic developments of the Age of Discovery. If their re-emergence had barely begun in 1789 it took concrete social and national form in the revolutions of 1848 and appeared to come to fruition in the new nation-states which replaced the old empires in 1918. Seen in this context 1989 fulfilled the unredeemed promise of the Paris peace settlement and paved the way for the region's final integration in the 'common European home', in Mikhail Gorbachev's striking phrase. But its significance went beyond Europe. Francis Fukuyama's notorious proclamation of the 'end of history',

like the pronouncement of President George Bush Snr of a New World Order in 1991, would have been unthinkable without the overthrow of communism in our region. It is from this perspective that this chapter is written. By setting the events of 1989 in historical context it seeks to catch echoes which speak to and illuminate them, so that it becomes possible to see how far contemporary assertions of a decisive turn in regional, even global, historical processes may be upheld.

This chapter, then, treats 1989 as shorthand for the whole process of supersession of communist power in our region. Its three sections will follow a roughly chronological pattern, dealing with the background, course and wider implications of the revolutionary events themselves. Particular aspects of the past assume prominence in illuminating particular stages in the process. Thus, the background to 1989 invites comparison with the backdrop to revolutionary France. The key question in the second section is explicitly comparative: why did the liberal impulse in 1989 produce more stable outcomes than in 1848 and 1918? The parallelism between the key factors in 1989 – liberalism, socialism and nationalism – and the famous French triad of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity is suggestive not only for past and present but potentially the future. The way events in Eastern Europe have been perceived in the West, till today the power house of the modern era, points up issues which will come ever more to the fore in other non-European sectors of an increasingly globalised world. In touching on these themes, reference will be made not just to the famous dates already mentioned but to others less widely known, like 1867, year of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise which inaugurated nearly half a century of relative stability and growth in our region, or 1945–47/8 when many in it hoped a distinctive left-leaning non-communist consensus might be achieved.

The power and myth of communist messianism

Now that communism has lost its aura of fated uniqueness the memory of the power it exercised on imaginations, whether as incubus or ideal, is in danger of being lost. Before 1989 no established communist regime had been frontally overthrown; the events of that year were almost wholly unpredicted and sprang from no blueprint. In this the illuminating parallel is not with 1848, when clear models of constitutional regime change were known in our region, but with the 1780s. As with communism, absolutist monarchy presented itself as a monist system of theory and practice and had never been displaced by popular revolution. Diverse currents of ‘enlightened’ thought critical of authoritarian rule reflected nascent notions of a civic public sphere which were echoed in the discourse of pre-1989 dissidents. But both *philosophes* and dissidents were intellectual

theorists, who were far from expecting the collapse of existing structures any time soon and had no programme for such an eventuality. Arguably, the shifts of attitude in ruling elites were as important – Gorbachev was to relive Alexis de Tocqueville's famous adage about the *ancien régime*; that a bad regime is never in such danger as when it begins to improve.² The precedents are striking.

Yet other aspects of the parallel show up the strangeness of the communist system challenged in 1989. *Ancien régime* absolutism was the traditional norm, drawing authority from religious sanction. Communist regimes claimed a totally new legitimacy, that of history itself, in whose name they abjured all tradition. Leszek Kołakowski has said that for communists the most lasting belief, which outlived faith in the correctness of Marxism or the sunny uplands it promised, was that their creed was none the less, the way of the future, historical destiny.³ By the 1980s this bizarre situation, of a failed utopia that had nonetheless largely succeeded in inculcating its myth of immovable fate even in its opponents, had come to pass. Faced with it, the subjects of communism lived, the Polish writer Brandys once put it, not like West Europeans in a civilisation, but in a drama.⁴ And the communist sense of historic exceptionalism *was* in many ways justified. Nobles retained about half their share of the land after the great French Revolution and much of their social influence remained for generations; communism's restructuring of the social order was so total that landed and entrepreneurial classes vanished. Within a few years of initial French radicalism Napoleon was to pose as heir of the revolution while making a pact with the Vatican and reinforcing the traditional family in his Code; in communist Europe the former roles of women and religion appeared transformed beyond recall. Albanian elections regularly returned turn-out figures and votes for the Party of Labour at 99.99 to 100 per cent, figures almost credible to any witness of the pressure of electoral propaganda in that country. The unprecedented degree of communist social intervention led even its opponents to fear that a type of society new to history was indeed being created: Václav Havel's nightmare of atomised masses, where all moral sense had been sapped by conformist pressures and ritualised lying.

Communist exceptionalism was internalised also by western students of communism. When an alternative view did emerge for a time, it had a historiographical reflex. All modern government was about the management of change, declared the leading figure Samuel Huntington; the question was one of efficiency rather than ideology.⁵ This approach owed much to modernisation theory but also to notions of modernising autocracy popular with historians at the time: Napoleon III's Second Empire; Habsburg neo-absolutism in the 1850s; late tsarist industrialisation policy under Witte. Applied to Eastern Europe, however, these

perspectives tended to take the economic modernisation of the region too much on trust. Authoritarian modernisation was actually budding in South Korea and Singapore; communist economies were beginning their descent to the trough of the 1980s. Communist regimes really were strange, not to be slotted into more familiar categories. The totalitarian hypothesis, reviving as *detente* faded, obscured the possible parallel which did exist. For the makeshift nature of communist economic policy bore the same relation to the command model as the creaking operation of pre-1789 monarchies to theories of absolutism and 'feudalism'. In each case, liberal-minded revulsion led contemporaries to erect ideal types belied by a more complex reality.

It took a long time for communism's peculiar messianism to lose its force. As scenarios were successively tarnished, from the 1970s communism in our region sought legitimacy chiefly with claims of economic development and rising living standards. Unlike the Bolshevik single party inheritance, this last agenda was actually in line with the region's historic aspirations: attempts to overcome backwardness and egalitarian reactions against hierarchical, often alien, regimes had been part of the national revival movements of the nineteenth century. But by the 1980s flat-lining growth rates, mounting hard currency debts, ecological problems and failure to compete in the new world of western high-tech and glamour were undermining this remaining ideological prop. Realising that this society did not fit established models, observers sought to work out where its core lay, in upwardly mobile workers of peasant origin, say, or in the intelligentsia's drive for class power and allocation through control of information rather than the market.⁶ But such perspectives begged questions in the 1980s, when economic stagnation meant there was little to allocate and Connor's predictions of the blockage of avenues of advance were being fulfilled.⁷ Images developed of a sclerotic society in which top-heavy economies were kept going by manipulation and tinkering. History broke back increasingly into the narrative with the blatant nationalism of Balkan leaders and Serb-Croat polemics over Second World War massacres. Szelényi tried to trace pre-war lineages of enterprising Hungarian peasants while his compatriot Hankiss speculated about a civil society alternative to communism in the context of earlier challenges to would-be hegemonic ideologies.⁸

Yet these complex threads, pulling in different directions, only show how far a settled pattern of possible exits from the impasse was from emerging. Many observers in the most reform-minded countries, Poland and Hungary, feared that increasing pressure for change might precipitate a clamp-down.⁹ Timothy Garton Ash in the *New York Review of Books* in 1988 held up the Ottoman empire as a warning against the assumption that decline had to mean fall any time soon.¹⁰ The parallel is interesting

but its speedy falsification directs us to a number of further factors in the situation. For one thing, the international scene was quite different. While the Soviet empire had no allies among other major powers, the Ottoman empire was long propped up by Britain, France and Austria. More fundamentally, although both the tsarist/Soviet and Turkish empires were on the fringes of Europe, insulation from European culture was greater for Muslim Ottomans than for Orthodox, then Marxist Russians. Gorbachev in particular represented the long-standing 'westernising' pro-European tendency in Russian history ostensibly held by Soviet communism as a whole. His sincere engagement with the European Enlightenment breathes through his willingness to put universal human values before class struggle and to endorse 'the compelling necessity of freedom of choice', even though such statements aligned him with the rhetoric of the Soviets' historic enemies.¹¹

There is a personal background to this in Gorbachev's formative and student years at moments of relative liberalisation during the war and post-Stalinist thaw. But a historical syndrome may also be at work, when rulers in traditionally autocratic states repudiate past errors with little regard for the possible backlash. Tocqueville mocked the high-flown preambles to reform edicts in late *ancien régime* France.¹² A closer regional analogy is the willingness of Joseph II (and much later Kemal Atatürk) to override ideological taboos in the interest of rational reform. The Austrian Enlightenment involved buying into the overwhelmingly Protestant model of German Enlightenment sponsored by the Habsburgs' Prussian rival. This was a big deal in a state built on the Counter-Reformation. Such processes are aided by confident individuals like Gorbachev and Joseph II, encouraged by supreme power, intellectual curiosity and rejection of a failed past, but impatient of historical introspection. Gorbachev's role in facilitating 1989 is hard to exaggerate. Whether in his endorsement in December 1988 of Jaruzelski's plan to open negotiations with Solidarity which most Polish district party secretaries opposed, his go-ahead for a majority non-communist Polish government in August the next year or his acquiescence in the opening of Hungary's western frontier and the Berlin Wall, he took decisions which ensured one set of outcomes out of many that were possible.

Taking together economic failure and what turned out to be the Kremlin's genuine stance of non-intervention, all that was needed, arguably, to set the revolutions of 1989 in train were what prime minister Harold Macmillan once called 'events, dear boy, events': in this case Solidarity's electoral victory and the opening of the Hungarian western border. What place does such a scenario leave for the celebrated dissidents? Some scholars have indeed been dismissive both of the originality and relevance of their ideas, the efficacy, for example, of Konrád's creed of 'antipolitics' for the

building of a civic democracy.¹³ There is a major historical backdrop here. The influence of the Enlightenment in the origins of the French Revolution has been debated since the revolution itself. Sceptics have argued that their ideas were read in limited circles, lacked unity and bore little relation to the bloody events that followed.¹⁴ At three points historical analogy can be helpful. First, suggestions that the *philosophes* may have had more influence after the revolution had actually broken out, as in the case of Rousseau's *Social Contract*, have relevance for my next section and I shall return to this theme there. Second is Robert Darnton's thesis that Enlightenment ideas did have a causative role, not directly but through what he calls the 'Grub Street' journalism of would-be intellectuals who, unable to break through to public fame, vented their spleen in scurrilous pamphlets on the morals of priests and aristocrats – and these *were* widely read.¹⁵ It is an insight which can be applied to the pre-1989 climate too, insofar as groups like the Orange Alternative in Poland, the Czech Children or the John Lennon Peace Club in Prague all mocked the communists rather than critiqued them philosophically. Their scale was less than the illicit publishing trade in pre-revolutionary France, but they reflected a certain shift in communism's last decade from public fear of absolutist authority to ridicule and contempt for it.¹⁶ Single issue actions, as on ecological matters, show the same move of dissent from theoretical critique to more varied and accessible protest. Finally, and more generally, men like Havel, Michnik and Kuroń (less so, perhaps, Hungarian dissidents like Kis and Konrád), operated in more hostile regimes than the *philosophes*. If they did not advance beyond the common coin of civil liberties that the Enlightenment had first championed, their originality may be seen in their acute analysis of the peculiar atmosphere of communist oppression and resourcefulness in seeking ways of nurturing morale under it, creating social and psychological space in the interstices of a highly restrictive society from which alternatives might emerge. Havel's parable of the greengrocer who hangs up the slogan 'workers of the world, unite!' in which he does not believe conveys the full strangeness of living in a failed utopia, where ostensibly non-political acts like the omission of meaningless rituals could be a form of *Resistenz*, the German term used to denote an inner 'immunity' towards official ideology combined with outward conformity.¹⁷

The strongest argument for the influence of the dissidents is that Gorbachev himself was not immune to it, albeit mediated through the communist reform impulses he followed approvingly in Hungary and Poland. There is a tendency for participants in the present to see it in stark contrasts, the Obama of 2008 or the Mubarak of 2010, say, or in the 1980s dissident heroes and communist villains. Historical perspective relativises somewhat, and breaks down over-compartmentalisation between autocratic rulers, critical intellectuals and demonstrating masses.

Let me reiterate as the theme of this first section the relevance of the 1780s to our topic, and the appropriateness of Tocqueville's famous dictum of the dangers in reforming bad regimes.

The 1989 revolutions: historical parallels

What of the revolutionary year, 1989? We must remember, first, that 1989 had two aspects: the so-called negotiated revolutions in Poland and Hungary, for which Garton Ash coined the term 'refolution',¹⁸ and the dramatic events of the autumn. What is the relation between the two, and does the fact that a largely non-communist government came to power in Poland before the fall of the dominoes diminish either the Polish experience or the later events? Second, why, or to what extent, was liberalism more successful at its third attempt in the region than it had been in 1848 and 1918? Indeed, why did the revolutions take a liberal form in view of the historic obstacles to this creed in the region?

Both the negotiated and the more spontaneous revolutions of 1989 played indispensable roles in the overall process of that year. The Polish election results of June and the Solidarity-led government formed thereafter in August reshaped the sphere of the possible in the region. But without the leeway afforded it by later upheavals the new government might well have faltered, given communists' continuance in key posts and an economic crisis in which its market policies were unpopular even with its own supporters. Scholarly hesitation over the use of the word 'revolution' for the negotiated phase may be coloured by the violent associations evoked by the iconic French precedent, which mostly relate to the later Jacobin phase. The French Revolution proceeded through stages rather than a once and for all apocalyptic act, and the early 'storming of the Bastille' involved forced entry of a fortress containing a mere seven prisoners. If Jaruzelski remained head of state, so did Louis XVI, for twice as long. The element of compromise entailed in the Round Table negotiations, deplored later by segments of Polish opinion, was essential to the transition process at the time since otherwise the communists would have short-circuited it. Jon Elster has shown the parallel between the Round Table discussions and the preliminary meeting of the Estates General in 1789 to verify the delegates' mandates, which revealed at the start the essence of the issues at stake.¹⁹ Closer in time are the negotiations which ended authoritarianism in some Latin American countries and in Spain and Portugal in the 1970s, of which Michnik was well aware. The models scholars have constructed from these of a four-way interplay, of radicals and moderates on each side, leading to an option for settlement, have a bearing for Poland. There, communist party leaders drew closer to Solidarity and away from their own hardliners.²⁰

It is 1848, however, which provides the best analogies to events as they developed from the autumn. There are constant echoes: the chain reaction of dramatic demonstrations; the regimes' failure or reluctance to deploy their means of repression; the programmatic similarities – a 1990 Hungarian electoral poster printed the 'twelve demands' of Hungarian revolutionaries in March 1848 alongside its own; the vanguard role of students (absent in 1789). But euphoric exultation echoing that in 1848's 'Springtime of the Peoples' was partly checked in western media by voices reflecting the disillusionment which had followed previous dawns. Dahrendorf warned soberly against replacing one ideological 'system' by another, while predicting that social healing would be a very long-term process.²¹ Some commentators thought authoritarian trends, rooted in regional political culture, the more likely outcome.²² After all, there was little precedent for successful liberal democracy, except Czechoslovakia – and a feature of post-1989 historiography has been critical reappraisal of the Czechoslovak experience.²³

Why, indeed, did forms of democracy implant themselves better in the region than before? And why liberal democracy when most of the dissidents, beyond civil rights, were less clearly liberal than a Kossuth or a Palacký? Economically, their sympathies, if anything, were social democratic-tinged; and Solidarity was a trade union. Here the question of influence after the initial break-through, touched on earlier, becomes relevant: dissident leaders played a key role in providing organisation to disparate phenomena and giving direction to events they had not anticipated. In *ancien régime* France the different revolutions – nobiliar, peasant, sans-culottes and Third Estate – came together after a fashion under predominantly 'bourgeois' leadership. Likewise, in 1989 would-be emigrants (East Germany) or students (Czechoslovakia) first set events in motion; Havel was not involved in plans leading to the Prague demonstration of 17 November. But within four days it was he who on behalf of the newly constituted Civic Forum addressed the vast crowd in Wenceslas square as *de facto* national leader. Just as, under the pressure of events, French revolutionaries, notably the Jacobins, had recourse to Rousseau's theory of the general will in ways which belied the revolution's initial decentralist principles, so leaders in 1989, facing potential economic disaster and without a concrete economic programme of their own, turned to one which confidently offered solutions. Market principles enjoyed unprecedented prestige, were considered tried and tested and aligned them with their potential western allies.²⁴ Hence the rise to prominence of individuals already committed to them, often not former dissidents at all but back-room boys, silent heretics in communist planning agencies, such as Václav Klaus. Unobserved at the time, there had been a turn late in the 1980s in some opposition ranks towards free market principles.²⁵ Men like Leszek Balcerowicz saw it as their task to degut

the social provisions which the Round Table agreement had secured for Solidarity's working-class members.²⁶ It was felt necessary to strike in the window of opportunity while populations were still biddable. Experience of private enterprise in late communism had been largely positive: small business filling a gap, not multinationals downsizing a workforce. Even in more socialist East Germany economic crisis smoothed the way to liberal economics surprisingly quickly.

If this helps explain the nature of post-communist regimes, external and internal factors eased their consolidation. The revolutions of 1789 and 1848 had been followed by war; Kossuth's independent Hungary was crushed by tsarist troops. The inter-war 'successor states' of the old empires were shadowed by Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. Crucial to the more benign evolution of the 1990s was that Germany was democratic and Russia nominally so. This unprecedented ideological consensus is the germ behind Fukuyama's much-scorned thesis of the end of history. Yet international support alone cannot sustain value systems in historically alien territory, as Afghanistan shows. Communist industrialisation, however, had undermined the social forces which helped confound liberal revolutionaries in 1848–49 and parliamentary democracy between the wars. In 1930 three-quarters of the Balkan population and three-fifths of Poles were dependent on agriculture. By the late 1980s this averaged barely a quarter.²⁷ Living standards had risen, so that the economic hardships of the 1990s did not reduce most people to precarious subsistence, as in the Slump years, wreaking the havoc pessimists had feared. Bulgarians lived on average twenty years longer than in the late 1930s. Moreover, dissatisfied non-dominant groups, who opposed liberal Hungary in 1848 and dogged the successor states, had been cut back from two-thirds of the population in 1914 to a quarter after 1918–20 and perhaps 6–7 per cent after the Second World War. A consequence of these socio-demographic shifts was to make parliamentary democracy more workable. Whereas inter-war Poland had four main party blocs – rightist nationalists, socialists, peasantists and national minorities, each sub-divided – the still numerous parties of the 1990s could resolve into two blocs, roughly left and right. As workers' acquiescence in free-market liberalism wore off with recession, a swing of the electoral pendulum brought victory for ex-communists and their allies in Poland, Lithuania and Hungary in 1993–4. But the left's return actually helped the bedding down of the new political system, since the ex-communist parties also accepted the market consensus.

This line of argument is leant support by the more troubled Balkan lands. They showed a social lag vis-à-vis the northern tier of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, often dubbed the Visegrád lands at this time after the Hungarian town where their leaders met. This lag expressed itself in the higher proportion of peasants, whose fear for entitlements and

respect for authority set many against the anti-communist, professedly democratic opposition strong in the towns. Thus, the democrats lost the initial elections in Bulgaria, Romania, Albania and Serbia to essentially ex-communist parties, and transition was fraught. In multinational Yugoslavia this was exacerbated by the national problem, hoariest of historical legacies. In 1848 divisions between Germans and Poles in Prussia, Germans and Czechs in the Bohemian lands, and Magyars and non-Magyars in historic Hungary had destroyed initial liberal concord. The problem was the tension between individual and collective rights. The Czech leader Palacký had sought to equate them as equally valid natural rights: 'the rights of nations are the rights of Nature'.²⁸ But even if agreement could be reached on what constituted a nation, the problem remained of reconciling rival national claims to the same territory.

The solution applied at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference was to accept nations' right to self-determination in their own sovereign territory, while granting rights short of sovereignty to territorial minorities. This solution foundered between the wars, particularly between Czechs and 'Sudeten' Germans, so that from 1945 the drastic alternative of ethnic cleansing was adopted, eliminating the problem except in Yugoslavia and the successor states of the old Hungary. Titoist Yugoslavia tried another tack: equality for nations and smaller 'nationalities' within an elaborate federalism which slotted into a system of devolved 'socialist self-management'. This followed previous compromises, like recognition of a Serb national entity within a Croat state nation in Habsburg Croatia, and the equality of Serb, Croat and Slovene 'tribes' within a posited Yugoslav nation between the wars. In the event socialist self-management proved an exercise in identity 'securitisation' as delusive as the American sub-prime market. The problem of competing claims to the same territory remained and was complicated by new ones, such as the rise of previously despised groups like the Kosovo Albanians or of nations newly recognised on novel grounds, like the Muslims in Bosnia (neither language nor religion but cultural heritage).²⁹ Yugoslavia's tragedy was that social progress produced fragmentation, not unity.³⁰ The horrors of the 1990s were a brutal response to the failure of repeated attempts to solve real problems, where multiple factors were involved.

Thus, the Balkans' social and national structures implicitly shed light on the relative consolidation of the 1989 revolutions in the Visegrád states. Relative because it seems fair to say that the regular swings of the electoral pendulum have reflected discontent with successive governments rather than a fully mature party system, ideal type as this might be. David Ost has argued from a left-leaning standpoint that the Polish case after 1989 shows the betrayal of the workers by Solidarity. Hence, labour failed to emerge as a strong force necessary in a healthy democratic system, based on

concrete interests which could be negotiated within a capitalist framework. In its place, he claims that from the Polish constitutional arguments of 1996–97 came a political system founded on non-negotiable ideological notions, of a true Christian Poland to be defended from communists and liberal secularists.³¹ For this perspective the negotiated settlement of 1989 lacked legitimacy because it did not purify Poland from the continuing atheist-communist taint.

Ost's interpretation is highly charged. But undeniably the liberal settlement of 1989 entailed a defeat for the left in almost all the guises it had historically taken. Certainly the radical elements which were present early on in our region, in similar forms to 1848 (organised students and young progressives à la Petőfi, the Hungarian national poet killed by tsarist invaders), were snuffed out as they had been then. So were wider hopes, of a somewhat different provenance, of reviving the idea of a leftist progressive consensus, rooted in the National Front or Progressive Front coalitions of 1945–47/8. An aspect of Stalin's 'people's democracy' strategy while he was still reluctant to break openly with the western allies, these fronts nonetheless suited a variety of peasantist, social, liberal and Christian democrats, who did not much mind the banning of right-wing parties involved. The phenomenon can be pushed back further, to the coalitions which opposed authoritarian or pseudo-democratic regimes between the wars;³² indeed, to the whole reform tradition of the nineteenth century, briefly reflected in the victory of the centre-left in the first elections after 1918 in several countries of the region. A socialist version of such hopes was particularly strong in East Germany, but its dream of a genuinely independent socialist GDR faded as the demonstrators' cry 'we are the people' changed to 'we are one people', presaging Christian Democratic victory in the East German election of March 1990 and later incorporation into the Federal Republic. A radical 'third-way' version in the peasantist tradition had purchase in Hungary because of the role of the prestigious thinker István Bibó in 1945–47 and 1956, but the ambiguities present in Hungarian peasant-orientated populism already in the 1930s tended to resolve themselves increasingly along older lines still, of hostility of the countryside to an urban liberalism perceived as Jewish. In place of a total break with the communist era, what emerged was a certain rapprochement between groups from the former opposition and from the former *nomenklatura*, while wealth divisions widened. In Hungary it took form in the 1994 coalition government of ex-communists and Free Democrats. In Poland it found expression in the good relations between men like the dissident become leading editor, Michnik, and the Polish ex-communist president from 1995, Aleksander Kwaśniewski – though the bad blood between Solidarity and the communists ruled out formal party cooperation.

In fact, the working out of 1989 in the following years bears some likeness to the system inaugurated by the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. What happened then was a deal between moderate liberals and Franz Joseph and the imperial bureaucracy at the expense of the radical forces of 1848. In a further crucial parallel, the triumph of the moderate liberals benefited, as in the 1990s, from the defusing of international tensions: in that case the resolution of the German and Italian questions through unification and of the 'Eastern Question' by the Congress of Berlin in 1878. This perspective relativises the achievement of stability in our region in the 1990s, by sensitising analysts to potential fissures in the social order such as sapped the late nineteenth-century system, like its marked inegalitarianism and weak party political structures. Comparable weakness applies to both wings of the present party spectrum. In general the right in the region after 1989 has been split between nationalists, clericals and secular conservatives. But a left dominated by dubious ex-communist parties which relied on their old networks was also potentially unstable as its implosion in Poland and Hungary now shows. It is legitimate to ask how robust these structures might prove if the international structures underpinning the settlement also decline in authority, as eventually happened to Europe's bourgeois order by 1914.

Before 1989 predictions about the fall of communism belonged to the little regarded sphere of futurology. Insofar as some speculated, their assumptions were usually wide of the mark. Thus, the Slovak Milan Šimečka in 1978 believed that a post-communist regime, operating in a framework where the paraphernalia of pre-communist society had been swept away, would be a place for far-reaching social experiment.³³ My discussion, by contrast, has sought to explain the logic which made the revolutions of 1989 staging posts to a surprisingly traditional world of liberal constitutions, free market economics and reconstituted class societies, where more radical aspirations shrivelled. The structural parallel drawn with 1867, of epochal events serving to pave the way for consolidation of new elites, turns out to be one unexpected outcome of the enquiry. But on reflection it should not be so unexpected. History offers many examples of revolutionary turning points yielding apparently lesser fruits in the event. The English Civil War led to 1688 and the elitist Whig Ascendancy of the eighteenth century; the French Revolution produced Louis Phillipe via the 'ridiculous mouse' of Louis XVIII's 1814 Charter, which gave the vote to 0.3 per cent of the population. Real progress is nearly always piecemeal and the difficulty of achieving it requires seemingly disproportionate effort.

Therefore, due credit should be given to the achievements of 1989. Even if the analogy with the age of Franz Joseph were precise, that age seemed a haven of order and decency for many nostalgic citizens of East Central Europe over much of the twentieth century. But the analogy

is imprecise. Liberal democracy is not the institutionalised elitism of nineteenth-century liberalism. We are dealing with societies at different levels of development. There *had* been modernisation under communism. Moreover, the Compromise was essentially between two ethnic groups, Magyars and Austrian Germans; other groups bitterly resented a deal done over their heads. The region today is one of many sovereign nations for whom the experience of 1989 was one of inspiring affirmation. The last section will try to assess the wider impact of these events which so electrified the world. This has a two-fold aspect. It means tracing their consequences for international relations and the (re)interpretation of historical processes. Further, it means assessing how far 1989 helped overcome the historic gulf between the two halves of Europe – and thereby casting light on relations between ‘the west and the rest’ which are at the core of ongoing narratives of globalisation.

The ambiguous outcomes of 1989

The events of 1989 directly brought about the reunification of Germany, helped precipitate the fall of the Soviet Union and led eventually to the incorporation of most of our region in NATO and the European Union. It thereby gave institutional stiffening to the dream of equality in a democratic Europe which the 1919 peace-makers failed to provide. The Cold War was brought to an end and the unprecedented situation created of a single global superpower, whose language became the closest there has yet been to a global lingua franca. The whole tenor of intellectual debate changed, with long-standing focus on class and revolution yielding to discourses of democratic governance and ethnicity.

There is another way of looking at it. The working out of 1989 economically was several years of depression much sharper and longer than ‘Big Bang’ theories of economic reform allowed for. The terms of accession to the EU were less generous than for previous enlargements, including limitations on free movement of labour by most existing member states. Western reportage on East Central Europe increasingly focused on the social problems of transition, while scholarly perspectives suggested that the disintegration of communism was in train before 1989, which for all its drama did not really contribute anything new in terms of ideas. How far had the traditional western lack of deeper engagement with East Central Europe really changed? The five leading American political theory journals ‘broadly construed’ published only two articles out of 384 on 1989 in the four years after the events.³⁴ The anniversary of the breakthrough in 2009 aroused less media interest in Britain than those of Alfred Tennyson and Samuel Johnson’s births. One could argue that the tendency to view the region as proxy in western arguments rather than in its own terms

continued. Just as in debates on the origins of the Cold War, East Central Europeans had figured only marginally, as doughty democrats or backward nationalists, so in the 1990s they were fodder for western discourses of free market economics or multiculturalism.

Academic discussion reflects some of this ambiguity. The events of 1989 rehearsed the three great principles of the French Revolution, liberty, equality and fraternity, in modern guise as liberalism, socialism and nationalism. The wealth of evidence provided surely undercut partisan emphases on one or other of these themes in the intervening centuries: whether concentration on liberty at the expense of those lacking resources to use it, or views of History as the march of slogan-chanting 'masses' to a classless society. In the event the power of the idea of freedom, often queried from cynicism or disappointed idealism, was triumphantly vindicated by the great demonstrations of 1989. The people showed they could not be conned. But this did not mean that, shorn of Marxism-Leninism's messianic pretensions, egalitarian ideals had no appeal. Demonstrators acted in the belief that freedom would bring prosperity; and faced with free market dogmatism and cuts in state social provision voters returned the ex-communists to government in Poland, Lithuania and Hungary in 1993–94, baffling some western commentators.

How far have such inferences been drawn in the large literature on liberal democracy swelled by 1989? A school of global 'democratisation' studies, including other regions, was stimulated, with its own terminology of 'transition', 'consolidation' and 'sequencing' in the process. Much effort went into devising indexes by which progress in democratisation may be factorised and overall scores allotted. While social scientists are under pressure to deliver by policy-makers in ways historians are not, such perspectives can appear too cut and dried, with certain factors isolated for consideration which reflect the western metropole's definitions of democracy and/or lend themselves to calculation. Perhaps a certain triumphalism was unavoidable in the circumstances, which were plausibly interpreted as final victory for the West in the Cold War both by western scholars and those in the region. But the result has been, arguably, an exaggerated emphasis on the procedural aspects of democracy which Marxism minimised and a related tendency to a tick-box approach, an orientation to targets, as, say, in market deregulation, as if unregulated capitalism was the very measure of democracy. This is ironic as the target culture and the distortions to which it can give rise were a notorious feature of communism. Social scientists themselves have criticised flawed approaches: Stepan and Linz, for example, in the case of over-economistic approaches to democracy; Bermeo and Nord in demonstrating that western nineteenth-century societies did not meet conventional criteria laid down for successful civil society.³⁵ Overall, the fall of communism has spurred

democratisation studies which incline somewhat too much towards formal models, political and economic, reflecting western ideal types as much as actual western practice. Awareness has grown of the importance of the social, cultural and legal infrastructure required to nurture democratic practice, hence of the need to pay more attention to the region's specific inheritance, understood in terms of 'thick description', in the anthropologist Clifford Geertz's telling phrase.

This also holds good with regard to the third great French revolutionary principle, fraternity. The equation of this with nationalism in our region may surprise, since the latter term bears less favourable associations; but historically it is justified. The French Revolution began when the Third Estate declared itself the nation, a union of free and equal citizens, and the war which consolidated this nationhood was proclaimed in the name of fraternal liberation of the oppressed elsewhere. There were fraternal moments in 1848 in the Wenceslav meeting of Czech and German liberals in Prague in March 1848, among Magyar and Serb *littérateurs* in Pest and with greater longevity between Serbs and Croats. The fraternity of national 'solidarity' – a significant word – was on display in the great crowds of 1989, with their pervasive national motifs, the echoes of 1848 in Hungary, the anniversary of the 1939 anti-Nazi demonstration which launched the Velvet Revolution in Prague and the cries for German reunification in Berlin. Western opinion, forgetting the nexus of liberalism and nationalism in the origins of its own story, was less attuned to this emotive aspect of our theme. Viewing nationalism primarily as the irrational expression of ancient hatreds, it saw its suspicions confirmed by the Hungarian-Romanian clashes in Transylvania in the spring of 1990 and the long-drawn out Yugoslav tragedy.

The result, paralleling democratisation studies, has been a remarkable expansion of work on ethnicity and nationalism but through a similar prism of western assumption. Natural revulsion at Yugoslav events led to an over-rigid polarisation between civic 'constructivist' concepts of nationhood (good) and 'primordialist' ethnic ones (bad). Marx's depiction of civic-minded German liberals versus racially motivated Slav nationalists in the Habsburg monarchy in 1848 shows the weakness of this approach; it is too convenient for dominant cultures challenged from below and overlooks the ethnic aspects of any political community.³⁶ In fact, nearly all revolutionary actors concerned in 1848 combined liberal and nationalist ideas. This is not to excuse Milošević in the 1990s, just to point out that the default demonisation of the ethnic or national element in conflict situations is too sweeping. These are academic issues, but they are not unrelated to the assertion of western civic prescriptions in a global framework, in pursuit of the New World Order proclaimed by President Bush. The consequences have been mixed. The bombing of Serbia to force a solution

of the Kosovan crisis can be justified, but it produced an over-confidence which led to more problematic interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. International thinking on matters of sovereignty and self-determination has become confused. While it must be good that rogue states can no longer shelter behind notions of sovereign inviolability, claims to a right of liberal interventionism, akin to an older liberal imperialism, are open to charges of selectivity in practice. It is curious that Western powers, which welcomed the fall of multiethnic states in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, have mandated similarly cumbersome ethnic-orientated federalism in Bosnia and Iraq.³⁷ The stretching of ethnic self-determination almost to breaking point (beyond Kosovo to Abkhazia and South Ossetia) is dialectically linked to the revival of interest in its opposite pole, empire, both in academic theory and great power practice. In all this confident statements about the universality of liberal democracy have foundered on economic difficulties, ethno-cultural complexities and the inability of elections to resolve them.

Thus, it is that the dramas of 1989 were, until recent events, in danger of being diminished in contemporary imaginations. A major reason, if the analysis presented here is correct, has been the appropriation of 1989 to fit an American-led model of global free-market democracy about which there is increasing disenchantment. Citizens of our region glad to be welcomed (back) into the western fold from which Moscow had excluded them may well feel they were greeted as symbols as much as bearers of their own historic individualities. Actually, opinion in large western nations, mainly past imperial powers, is inclined to be suspicious of the sort of ethno-cultural tenacity which East Central European history demonstrates. A sense of this tenacity in the Muslim world, in particular, has contributed to disillusionment about hopes for a western-led globalism sprung from 1989.

This is why the recent upheavals in North Africa and the Near East are potentially significant in refocusing perspectives on 1989. Fears that the Arab and Muslim world was not interested in democracy have been largely falsified by what has happened. Freedom is a universal value. But the economic aspect of the protests cannot be overlooked, any more than it should be in 1989. Similarly, wounded national pride, a sense of national impotence exhilaratingly cast off with old rulers like Mubarak in hock to foreign powers, is as plain as in 1989. A further parallel is the problem the West has faced in gauging a balanced response after the initial euphoria. The problems in stabilising democratic regimes in the Near East are vastly greater than in our region, as recent developments in Libya, Egypt and elsewhere have shown. Yet socio-psychological forces have been revealed which were in danger of being forgotten or denied and that cannot change, whatever the inevitable disappointments. This time, moreover, there is less danger of events being appropriated to fit agendas outside the region. The

national element in the Arab Spring cannot be absorbed into a western success story because it is critical of the West. A successful response to this challenge will proceed along multipolar rather than hegemonic lines. Seen in this perspective, 1989 reclaims its rightful place, as a vital date not only in European but in global history: a staging post in the process of adjustment of unequal relations between a dominant West European/North American metropole and other regions. The closest to the metropole was naturally East Central Europe and its long half-submerged nations, now accorded their full European inheritance.

We might interpret 1989, then, as European echo and global precedent. This no doubt savours of euphoria. As far as the global dimension is concerned, any future will have its 1848s, the ‘turning-point that failed to turn’. Except that in our region it did eventually, if only to yield 1867. Real progress is always piecemeal. This is why the previous section referred to the age of Franz Joseph to avoid over-heightened claims. The fate of East Central Europe has always been bound up with power politics in a wider sphere and that continues. What one can indubitably say is that most of the region now finally shares its fate with the rest of Europe. This outcome of the revolutions suffices to make them a historic achievement, whether or not a further role as exemplar for other non-dominant regions, here held in prospect, is fulfilled.

Notes

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- 2 A. de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Regime and the French Revolution* (London, 1966), p. 196. First published in 1856.
- 3 Statement by Kołakowski in answer to a question at the conference ‘Under Eastern/Western Eyes: Britain and Polish Culture’ held at the University of Warwick, 13–15 December 1990.
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- 5 S. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, 1968), p. 1.
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 - 10 T. Garton Ash, 'The Empire in Decay', *New York Review of Books*, 29 September 1988, pp. 53–60.
 - 11 G. R. Chafetz, *Gorbachev, Reform and the Brezhnev Doctrine: Soviet Policy toward Eastern Europe, 1985–1990* (Westport, 1992), pp. 85 and 100.
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 - 14 A. Cobban (a trenchant sceptic), 'The Enlightenment and the French Revolution' in Cobban, *Aspects of the French Revolution* (London, 1968), pp. 18–28; R. Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution* (Durham and London, 1991).
 - 15 For a concise summary, see R. Darnton, 'The High Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature in Pre-Revolutionary France', *Past and Present*, no. 51 (1971), pp. 81–115.
 - 16 P. Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe in 1989* (Princeton, 2002), pp. 157–91.
 - 17 V. Havel, 'The Power of the Powerless', in V. Havel et al., *Living in Truth* (London, 1987), pp. 41–2 and 55–6; M. Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949–1989* (Oxford, 1995), p. 152 (*Resistenz*).
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 - 20 A. Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge, 1991), especially chapter 2; *Negotiating Radical Change: Understanding and Extending the Lessons of the Polish Round Table*, project directed by M. D. Kennedy and B. Porter, www.umich.edu/PolishRoundTable/negotiatingradicalchange (last accessed 21 September 2012).
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 - 22 For example, K. Jowitt, *New World Disorder* (Berkeley and London, 1992), chap. 8.

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- 28 Palacký's text is translated in *Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 26 (1947–48), pp. 303–8.
- 29 'Muslim' spelt with a capital letter denoted ethnic status, not necessarily religious faith, which was expressed by 'muslim' with lower case or 'Islamic'.
- 30 There is no comprehensive study of the Yugoslav nationality question. These remarks aim to get beyond generalisations about 'ancient hatreds' or the evils of 'ethnic nationalism'.
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- 33 M. Šimečka, *The Restoration of Order: The Normalization of Czechoslovakia, 1969–1976* (London, 1984), p. 150.
- 34 J. C. Isaac, 'The Strange Silence of Political Theory', *Political Theory*, vol. 23 (1995), p. 637.
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- 36 K. Marx, *Revolution and Counter-revolution, or Germany in 1848*, ed. Eleanor Marx Aveling (London, 1891). For an illuminating treatment of the relation of ethnic and civic factors, see G. Schöpflin. *Nations, Identity, Power* (London, 2000).

- ³⁷ R. M. Hayden, “‘Democracy without a Demos’: The Bosnian Constitutional Example and the Intentional Construction of Nonfunctional States’, *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 19 (2005), pp. 206–59. The point seems valid despite the polemical tone.

Part II

The ‘Gorbachev factor’

The multifaceted external Soviet role in processes towards unanticipated revolutions

Mary Buckley

Mikhail Gorbachev was an essential enabler of revolutions in Eastern Europe. As General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) from March 1985, he framed changes and developments and was shaped by them in an unfolding multivariate dynamic. The revolutions were the culmination of complex processes of change, and need to be understood not merely through the events of 1989. At different times, Gorbachev was facilitator, trigger, approver, persuader and loser, throughout tugged in various directions by different political actors and pressures at home, in East Central Europe and internationally. My aims here are: first, to provide an overview of key political signals and messages, both explicit and implicit, that Gorbachev, other leaders and social movements in the USSR gave to East European elites and peoples from 1985 onwards; second, to indicate how Gorbachev interpreted some of the responses and why he had to adopt similar and different approaches to East European states; and, third, to comment briefly on the utility of theories of revolution.

Signals, complexities and interactions

As initiator of *perestroika* (restructuring), Gorbachev sent signals to East European leaders that restructuring was not just a domestic policy for the USSR, but one that could be advisedly embraced by them as well. His role in indicating this had, over time, to be multifaceted due to significant variations across these states in their readiness for economic, social and political reform, in their different levels of commitment to change and in special issues that troubled them. At one end of the spectrum, some states in Eastern Europe could be overripe for, or in the process of, change, while at the other lay leaderships thoroughly resistant to it. Hungary and Poland in 1985 and to a lesser extent Bulgaria by December 1987 were clear examples of the former, while the German Democratic Republic (GDR)

and Romania fell into the latter category. Czechoslovakia can be considered initially in between with intellectuals in favour and leaders against reform. The special issues requiring attention and muddying relations with the USSR included investigation into the murder of Polish officers in 1940 in the Katyn forest, assessment of Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the question of FRG–GDR relations. Silence about, and growing attention to, these problems were integral to the processes of change that built up to, or came after, changes in power.

Significant roles were played by politicians other than Gorbachev and by social and political movements inside and outside the USSR and, particularly in the case of Germany from 1988 to 1990, by important political actors on the world stage, notably President George Bush and West European leaders. Gorbachev's external role was shaped by multiple interactions with political elites and social movements at home and internationally and also constrained by them. His political space for agency was thus on many occasions limited and frustrated, as well as supported or pushed further. And divisions among others buffeted Gorbachev. Furthermore, Soviet policy towards all East European states was caught up in a paradox, neatly pinpointed by foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze in his memoirs, 'A complicated collision arose: having repudiated "the export of ideas" and interference in the internal affairs of neighbours and allies, we could not actively, using former methods, push them into reforms.' In Shevardnadze's estimation, 'most leaders in these countries did not want changes' and from his colleagues in the foreign ministries in Eastern Europe he learnt how 'disturbed' they were by the developments that unfolded. At the time, the all-pervasive fear was that they would lose control quickly and 'adequate answers' to the supporters of democracy would not be found.¹

In addition, opposition to *perestroika* in the Soviet Union could prompt Gorbachev to ask an East European state to slow down its reforms, as happened with Bulgaria in October 1987, when Todor Zhivkov went too far in potentially weakening the power of the party in an about-turn from his initial opposition to *perestroika*.² Yet the growth of *glasnost* (openness) in the USSR, especially after 1987, and the flourishing of social movements for *perestroika* could also stimulate support for change in East Central Europe, just as revolutions in 1989 could feed back confidence to nationalist groups inside the USSR and inspire them to accelerate their pressures on the Soviet state for more radical changes, political sovereignty and ultimately independence. The tale is one of dynamic interacting processes unfolding at different political and social levels from above and from below.

Advisers' comments on political priorities and the Soviet ideological fray

Gorbachev's adviser Andrei Grachev has made the case that initially Eastern Europe was a low foreign policy priority for the new General Secretary because of what he characterises as an 'apparent tranquility' in the bloc. War in Afghanistan, East-West agreement on missiles and dealing with strains with China were higher priorities.³ Anatolii Chernyaev, Gorbachev's foreign policy assistant, is also of the opinion that the 'socialist community' did not hold 'much interest' for Gorbachev, who 'didn't want to emphasize his "leading role"'.⁴ Nonetheless, he did revive regular meetings of bloc first secretaries, something Brezhnev had stopped.⁵ Also Gorbachev maintains that he wanted to meet leaders of Warsaw Pact countries 'without delay', which he did after Konstantin Chernenko's funeral.⁶ Gorbachev claims, however, that he did not find this an 'easy meeting', his goal being 'to build bridges' with men who 'for dozens of years were used to following established stereotypes'. Feeling that the states needed 'revitalizing', Gorbachev insists that at the outset in March 1985 he stressed relations 'on an equal footing' and that all parties should take 'full responsibility for the situation in their own countries'. He interpreted this early meeting as 'a rejection of the Brezhnev doctrine', but felt that East European leaders 'were not taking it altogether seriously'. The central problem was 'the inertia of paternalism' and 'the tradition of dependency and obedience to the leader'. Thus, Gorbachev inferred that his ideas were treated with no more than 'polite curiosity' and 'even condescending irony'.⁷

Gorbachev was very angry, according to Chernyaev, when in mid-1985, Oleg Rakhmanin, deputy director of the Central Committee's (CC) Socialist Countries' Department, published, under a pseudonym, an authoritative article in *Pravda* in which he criticised 'independence and innovation in the socialist community'. This sent entirely the wrong message to Eastern Europe and the world. Chernyaev narrates how Gorbachev informed the Politburo on 29 July that he had already apologised to János Kádár and Erich Honecker, adding 'I had to sweat'. Apparently, Gorbachev told his colleagues that 'we are trying to improve relations with our socialist community' as 'first priority'.⁸ In response to Rakhmanin's broadsides, his critics soon entered the ideological fray. The academic Oleg Bogomolov stressed the importance of 'respect for national interests, independence and state sovereignty alongside non-interference in the internal affairs and observance of full equality'.⁹ It was evident that behind the scenes diametrically opposed views were held on Eastern Europe. Georgii Shakhnazarov, soon to be an influential adviser to Gorbachev, interpreted Rakhmanin as wanting to confirm the persistence of the Brezhnev Doctrine in opposition

to what he coined the new 'Gorbachev Doctrine' of non-interference. In Shakhnazarov's understanding 'each party must independently define its political course and take responsibility before its people'.¹⁰

Vladimir V. Kusin's initial appraisal of Gorbachev's relations with East European leaders as one of continuity and detached coolness, pointing neither to centrifugal nor centripetal tendencies, proved ultimately to be incorrect – albeit a partially fair assessment of 1985.¹¹ Gorbachev's general message of continuing 'fraternal friendship', along with his 'firmness and a good amount of understanding', effectively reiterated 'Soviet primacy'.¹² The new draft of the CPSU Programme published in October 1985 also offered no surprises with regard to Eastern Europe, talking of 'further development and strengthening of relations of friendship', with a brief nod to 'diversified cooperation', quickly followed by 'cohesion'.¹³ However, if Gorbachev's memoirs are accurate, direct statements from him to East European leaders concerning key changes afoot were already being made behind the scenes.

Hence, the year 1985 was not entirely bland. In lengthy political mobilisations that took place across the USSR in the run up to the 27th party congress in February–March 1986, relevant signals about future policies were being given. Just one month after taking the helm, Gorbachev introduced at the April CC plenum some of the buzz words of *perestroika*: 'activate the human factor', 'the necessity of acceleration and intensification', 'scientific and technological progress' and 'how to facilitate glasnost'. He also talked about the good sense of 'developing people's initiative'.¹⁴ Although the stock phrases of 'perfecting and deepening relations' with eastern bloc states were adopted, recognition was given to 'an exchange of opinions' regarding the Warsaw Pact.¹⁵

After the plenum, party conferences at local and regional levels followed by congresses at republican levels, all generated publicity through extensive television and press coverage. The hierarchical Soviet political pyramid in motion informed citizens that 'criticism and self-criticism' had to be pursued, regretting that some comrades had failed to free themselves of 'old ways'.¹⁶ In December 1985, *Pravda* reported that the party conferences had discussed the acceleration of scientific technological progress, the intensification of production and how to perfect ideological work.¹⁷ Those whose heads would roll, such as Vladimir Shcherbitskii, first party secretary of Ukraine, and Viktor Grishin, Moscow party boss, stood up and criticised failures. It was evident that changes were afoot, but what was not yet clear was their precise extent and limits. The broader indications for East European states were of redefinition and moving on and one definite signal was the widespread elite turnover in Soviet ministries and republican central committees commencing already in 1985. The point here is that those in East European states who were looking closely at the USSR for

intimations of what might happen in the future would see fresh patterns of leadership turnover and calls for 'new ways' and 'new styles'.

Some developments, however, such as Gorbachev's comment to Kádár after Chernenko's funeral that he would not attend the forthcoming Hungarian party congress, could be interpreted as being aloof.¹⁸ But then in July 1985 the removal of Andrei Gromyko from the post of foreign minister, which he had held for a long 28 years, and of other key figures strongly suggested that a freshness would be injected into Soviet–East European relations. Gorbachev resisted the expectations that he would automatically appoint Gromyko's deputy Georgii Kornienko as his replacement, instead turning to Shevardnadze. In fact, Chernyaev describes how the new General Secretary ignored Gromyko's remarks in a key Politburo meeting concerning his successor and praised Shevardnadze for 'his innovative spirit, courage and original methods'.¹⁹ Gorbachev's interpreter Pavel Palazchenko also characterised Shevardnadze sympathetically and positively as a man with 'an open mind'.²⁰ With his more modern style and smiling countenance Shevardnadze brought hope. Thus, in 1985 explicit signs showed an exciting break in the mould of foreign policy-making. The incoming new faces of 1986 – Anatolii Dobrynin, Vadim Medvedev, Georgii Shakhnazarov and Aleksandr Yakovlev – suggested new possibilities for East European states. Indeed, Yakovlev was promoted to the Politburo and Secretariat and later in 1988 was given a brief to oversee foreign affairs.²¹

The 27th party congress inspired more hope by formalising the build-up of fresh political formulations, styles and faces that were emerging in 1985 and early 1986. Most Soviet specialists would agree with Karen Dawisha that the event was 'little short of electrifying' with Gorbachev shown as a man of 'both vigour and vision'.²² The tone and mood of the new leadership augured alterations and an insistence that conformity was not the goal, but rather respect for national variations across states. Yet East Europeans were still left wondering quite how far developments would go and not all wanted them, especially Honecker and Nicolae Ceaușescu. In April 1986, at the GDR's 11th party congress, attended by Gorbachev, Honecker refrained from criticising his country, stressed its achievements and argued, to Gorbachev's chagrin, that economic policy was 'exemplary'.²³ Even Gorbachev himself, alongside a new vitality, continued to use some old stock phrases and hence could have been interpreted in Eastern Europe as giving contradictory messages. In June 1986, at the Polish party congress, he reaffirmed the irreversibility of socialism and praised the close economic, political, cultural and defence relations within the bloc. He stressed that anyone who wished to threaten socialism, or to undermine it from outside, was challenging the will of the people, post-war arrangements, and also peace.²⁴

Nicolai Petro and Alvin Rubinstein make the point that 'public assertion of principles is often a smokescreen for policy reversals and a necessary tactic for neutralizing domestic opponents'.²⁵ Undoubtedly, at home Gorbachev was battling to win supporters for *perestroika*, remove many of the old guard and offend as few of the *apparatchiki* as possible while he consolidated his position. It was hard for him not to give contradictory signals. Although statements should not necessarily be taken at face value, it was indeed the case that Gorbachev had no desire for radical changes to bloc solidarity. Nonetheless, as in the USSR, Gorbachev wished to see more dynamic politicians in Eastern Europe who initially would be in favour of economic reform. He made it clear that he supported turnover and wished to see pro-reform leaders at the helm. At the Polish party congress, consistent with his 'new thinking', Gorbachev insisted that '*my – za dialog*' ('we are for dialogue'). This not only concerned arms negotiations with the USA but general relations with other states and was linked to phrases such as 'human civilisation'.²⁶ Interviewed on Polish television, Gorbachev talked about 'open honest party conversation' for 'all the people, for our countries, for the whole world'.²⁷ Changes in direction were evident, even if still nebulous. Gorbachev affirmed that consulting East European leaders and 'comparing notes' rather than presenting a *fait accompli* was one new initiative, as apparently occurred before the Soviet–American summit in Geneva in 1985. Gorbachev believed 'our allies appreciated this consultation'. Importantly, he defined the overall approach from 1985 as 'an effort to establish a relationship of trust'.²⁸

Policies, dilemmas, actions, responses and perceptions

A strong case can be made that just as Gorbachev initially viewed *perestroika* as a revolutionary process, albeit within Leninist parameters, of inter-related changes in the Soviet economy, polity and society, so too the same socialist parameters framed his early view of East Central Europe.²⁹ In short, the logic of *perestroika* required that East European states also embraced it. And what it meant for East European states in Gorbachev's view followed on from what it meant for the Soviet Union. In the first instance, in 1986 and 1987, it called for economic reform with political change being advanced later after 1988. Thus, one can isolate what were effectively indispensable 'steps to revolution'. Gorbachev's dilemma was that he wanted East Europeans to emulate his inspiration, but hesitated to push them too hard since that went against the spirit of his policies.

It was logical to begin by stressing economic reform in Eastern Europe since that was Gorbachev's first objective for *perestroika* inside the USSR. Furthermore, subsidising the bloc was costly. Grachev quotes one leading Soviet official as saying that ensuring the stability of the East European

states cost five to ten billion dollars annually.³⁰ In his memoirs, Gorbachev complained that states were living beyond their means with Bulgaria's foreign debt at US\$10 billion and Hungary's around \$12–14 billion.³¹ Hence, one of the first Soviet steps was an attempt to reform Comecon, which Grachev believed the East European states 'did their best to sabotage'. However, at this point Gorbachev did not envisage any 'autonomous political evolution' independent of Moscow.³² Indeed, this was consistent with Gorbachev's early arguments on *perestroika* as a development of the socialist system, *within* the system.

Running parallel with his thoughts on economic reform was Gorbachev's rejection of a policy of military intervention in Eastern Europe as had occurred in 1956 in Hungary and 1968 in Czechoslovakia. According to Chernyaev, Gorbachev indicated this as early as 1985 to some bloc leaders in his first meetings with them.³³ He reiterated this view in July 1986 saying 'it is impossible to proceed as before'.³⁴ If there was any remaining doubt about this in the minds of East European leaders, it was dispelled at the November 1986 meeting of Comecon.³⁵ By the end of that year the messages from Moscow to Eastern Europe were to pursue 'new thinking' and 'new ways', 'take initiative in the workplace', reform the economy and trust that the USSR will no longer prop up state socialist systems challenged from below. Given the past, this combined package gave clear signals that changes, within limits, were timely. What caused some concern in Eastern Europe was the historical memory of crack-downs after reform. If Gorbachev were to be removed, what would this bode for change in the bloc? The aforementioned article published in *Pravda* in mid-1985 lambasted attempts to reform Eastern Europe and advocated a heavy hand over these states. Gorbachev had to send reassuring notes to leaders in which he dismissed the piece.³⁶ Nonetheless, hardliners at home were making their views on Eastern Europe explicit, thereby sending conflicting messages to the bloc.

In November 1986, at what Grachev describes as a 'hermetically sealed' and 'secret' working meeting of Gorbachev, prime minister Nikolai Ryzhkov and top leaders of the East European states, Gorbachev conveyed in no uncertain terms that 'the epoch of paternalism was over'. Now each party was accountable to its own citizenry with the old system of patron–client relations, with Moscow as patron, changing. Grachev maintains that some leaders were 'confused' by this, with Honecker and Zhivkov showing scepticism, while Kádár interpreted it as 'a green light to accelerate the policy of opening to the West'. Furthermore, Gorbachev indicated that economic ties between the USSR and Eastern European states needed to be 'mutually beneficial', not based on subsidy from Moscow. Thus, in November 1986 he gave very clear indications of economic and political reforms in inter-bloc relations. So much so that Valentin Falin, a top

foreign policy expert, contended that these key changes heralded no less than the beginning of the disintegration of the East European empire, a remarkably keen insight into the forthcoming dynamic.³⁷

Other changes in bloc relations were also visible. The programme for developing cooperation between the CPSU and the Polish United Workers' Party, agreed in January 1987, called for more direct links and 'upgrading and expanding human contacts', including joint 'television bridges' and Round Tables. These formed part of *glasnost*, exposé and freer discussion.³⁸ From the start, Gorbachev viewed General Wojciech Jaruzelski as committed to change and as a critic of 'excessive ideology' and took Kádár to be a man with 'democratic inclinations' willing to show 'respect for people's freedom to choose their own way of life'. Gorbachev notes that he enjoyed 'the greatest mutual understanding' with them and believed they had 'sincere interest in perestroika's success'. By contrast, he underlined how Ceauşescu instilled fear in his people and recounted how, on his visit to Bucharest in 1987, 'I was shocked to discover how frightened they seemed'. From Gorbachev's perspective, the response from Czechoslovakia was shaped by the history of 1968 with the reformers of the Prague Spring heavily pro-*perestroika* and party leaders very edgy lest Gorbachev repudiate Soviet intervention and thereby undermine their very legitimacy. Zdeněk Mlynář, Gorbachev's close Czech friend, simply characterised *perestroika* as 'what we did in [the] Prague [Spring]' and on his visit in 1987 Gorbachev admitted to feeling a 'kind of internal division' whenever he was asked how he assessed 1968.³⁹

In his memoirs, Gorbachev observes that once the meaning of his unfolding policies was grasped in Eastern Europe, he was met with refusals to accept *perestroika* 'especially when it came to democratisation and *glasnost*'. He dates this clear rejection at January 1987 when Honecker declared that *perestroika* did not 'suit' the GDR and then banned publication of the proceedings of the CPSU CC plenum of that month which subsequently became dissident material, apparently selling for 'fantastic prices'. Gorbachev also met 'total rejection' at this time in Romania.⁴⁰ If the extent of Gorbachev's vision was not yet fully clear, it surely was by the time of his speech to the UN General Assembly in December 1988 in which he argued that preserving 'closed' societies was now impossible, 'new machinery' was timely for the world economy and a 'different road to the future' was called for, not based on the revolutions of 1789 and 1917. He championed that 'freedom of choice is a universal principle that should allow for no exceptions' and that in both capitalist and socialist systems there should be an 'increasingly multi-optional nature of social development'. The words 'diversity', 'tolerance', 'difference' and the phrases 'not always agreeing' and 'de-ideologising relations' gave legitimacy to various paths within the bloc.⁴¹ In addition, notice that the

USSR was committed to withdrawing six tank divisions from the GDR, Czechoslovakia and Hungary by 1991, reducing Soviet forces there by 50,000 and tanks by 5,000, reinforced the message of radical change.⁴²

The historical irony, however, of this message was that some reformers in Eastern Europe believed that they should seize the political space to make choices to a degree not desired, nor envisioned by Gorbachev. And the Soviet leader actually lacked a clearly thought-out direction for the East European states beyond general observations consistent with his evolving perception of *perestroika* and socialist democracy within limits. Moreover, with politics in the USSR becoming increasingly volatile and his own path constantly redefined, his prime focus was on domestic pressures. Despite being in the socialist bloc, these states were literally 'to the side' of internal developments. Opposition to Gorbachev's economic reforms had made it necessary to make the Soviet ministries politically accountable in an attempt to prevent their 'brake' on changes; hence the especially convened 19th party conference of June 1988, six months before his speech to the United Nations.⁴³ The conference heralded a serious push for parliamentary and voting reform, finalised at the December meeting of the Supreme Soviet.⁴⁴

The new Congress of People's Deputies, elected in March 1989, resulted in a CPSU with three wings: those who resisted rapid change, such as Egor Ligachev; radical reformers, including Boris Yel'tsin, who was then still in the party, Yurii Afanas'ev and nationalists from Lithuania and elsewhere; and centrists, like Gorbachev, uneasily in between. Calls from within and from below for an end to Article 6 of the Constitution which enshrined the CPSU's leading role challenged the very logic of the political system. As the demands became louder, they sent more signals to Eastern Europe and to nationalists in the Soviet republics. Demands for 'sovereignty' from republics in the USSR effectively meant a power shift away from the All-Union to the republican level as they passed laws which contradicted those of the All-Union centre. A 'war of laws' ensued. Volatility in the Soviet Union in 1989 arguably contributed to calls in Poland and Hungary for an end to one-party rule. Furthermore, the role of the *neformaly* (informal pressure groups) in the USSR with their important newspapers⁴⁵ and growing number of demonstrations sent multiple messages to Eastern Europe about possibilities for criticism, demands and political action.

Another key dilemma was the German question. Initially, Gorbachev's view of GDR–FRG relations in 1985 showed consistency with recent Soviet security concerns. In a statement by Warsaw Treaty members on the nuclear threat issued in November 1985, the line was clear: any call 'for a revision of borders between European states and of their socio-political systems' contradicted trust, mutual understanding and good

neighbourliness. Soviet policy was that 'respect for the present territorial-political realities' was 'imperative' for 'normal relations' in Europe.⁴⁶ Any revival of 'revanchist forces', particularly in the FRG, was deemed a 'threat'. Similarly, Gorbachev made explicit his opposition to notions of wider German unity expressed in the FRG: 'We, naturally, are bound to be alerted by statements to the effect that the "German issue" remains open, that not everything is yet clear with the "lands in the East", and that Yalta and Potsdam are "illegitimate".' Gorbachev's message to the FRG and to President Ronald Reagan was that 'what has formed historically here is best left to history.' This, he stressed, applied to the German nation and to German statehood.⁴⁷ As relations with the FRG improved in 1987, Gorbachev remained loyal to this line.

When Gorbachev and Raisa Gorbacheva went to West Germany in June 1989, 'Gorbymania' was widespread among the crowds. Of this visit, Grachev observed that the Gorbachevs were moved by their positive reception, but that Gorbachev was surprised that citizens seemed to expect a solution to the national problem from him. He reiterated 'they must know that there can be no imminent unification'. However, although Chancellor Helmut Kohl did not raise the topic, the Soviet leader when asked about the Berlin Wall at a press conference said: 'Nothing is eternal. I don't exclude anything. History will take care of this problem.' In Grachev's assessment, this was a result of Gorbachev's own 'inner process of assessment' formulated not by what Kohl said, but by his own observations.⁴⁸ Such remarks – whether intended and thought-through or merely off-the-cuff and without strategy – had profound consequences as those wanting a united Germany hung on every word. Opposing views back in the USSR, epitomised by the arguments of patriots and hardliners, branded Gorbachev a traitor who had sold out to the West. Grachev remarks that, after the subsequent reunification of Germany, Gorbachev's 'expressions of self-assurance' were designed to hide the 'evident confusion' in Moscow and the lack of strategy to deal with the complexities of developments.⁴⁹ Perhaps in an attempt to answer those who criticised him for strategic blunders in Eastern Europe generally, Gorbachev later underscored that a new policy 'was not formulated immediately' and that it 'took shape gradually'.⁵⁰ This seems an entirely fair summary given that *perestroika* and the new political thinking were policies in motion that were both constrained by context and simultaneously themselves working on and changing context – and thereby were redefined by altering contexts too. The issue of the reunification of Germany, however, escalated quickly and Gorbachev could not politically outmanoeuvre Kohl, Bush and François Mitterrand on questions of the pace of the project and NATO membership.

The spectrum of Soviet responses

Whereas Gorbachev had to speak plainly to Honecker about the dire need for change as late as October 1989⁵¹ and also had heated arguments with Ceaușescu, whom he approached ‘with irony and contempt’ and sometimes called ‘the Romanian führer’,⁵² no such role was required with regard to Poland and Hungary where events galloped faster than he may have liked. Here the situations were such that reforms began internally with the knowledge that Gorbachev would approve, not oppose. Where his official sanction for change was felt necessary, it was simply requested. In Hungary, for example, Kádár sought Soviet approval for his resignation and for his nomination of Károly Grósz to succeed him. In the role of approver, Gorbachev sent Vladimir Kriuchkov from the KGB to represent him as he was fluent in Hungarian.⁵³ By contrast, when in September 1989 Budapest decided to let GDR citizens cross the Austro-Hungarian border, the Hungarian prime minister Gyula Horn admitted that Moscow’s permission was not requested ‘in order not to embarrass Gorbachev’.⁵⁴ Thus, Gorbachev’s role, and space for action, was often shaped by what other political actors wanted from him. When, however, Honecker asked Gorbachev to intervene and tell the Hungarians to stop the outflow of Germans over their border, the Soviet leader reportedly declined. In this way, he tried not to go against his own convictions. In similar vein, Palazchenko describes how Gorbachev suggested to Polish prime minister Rakowski that the government should not use force to end strikes, but rather seek agreement with Solidarity. In the circumstances, Palazchenko puts this down to ‘Gorbachev’s political courage’ since there were those quite willing to back force.⁵⁵

Yet fresh leaders in Eastern Europe did not necessarily mean a hastened pursuit of *perestroika* ‘their-style’. Husák, for example, may have been replaced in Czechoslovakia by Miloš Jakeš, but, according to Raymond Garthoff, he was ‘only slightly less rigid’. Garthoff contends that East European leaders ‘used their new freedom to ward off Soviet-style perestroika, glasnost and *demokratizatsiya* rather than emulate it’. New leaders even sacked those more predisposed to reforms, such as Chudomit Aleksandrov in Bulgaria and Lubomír Štrougal, Czechoslovakia’s prime minister.⁵⁶ Evidently, elite turnover was generally insufficient for revolution (with the possible exception of Hungary), which required more radical solutions through mobilisations from below. Indeed, absolutely vital to the dynamic of changes were the roles of social movements and processes of electoral reform giving rise to significantly democratised parliaments, as in the USSR.

However, although changes were initially haltingly held back and challenged, ultimately they did not stay within the confines that Gorbachev

would have liked. For example, in Poland elections in June 1989 resulted in victory for Solidarity and a non-communist prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki. Andrew Michta characterises it as a 'two-stage negotiated revolution' that was essentially 'pacted', beginning with Round Table political compromises between communists and the opposition and followed by elections and a 'contract parliament' which 'destroyed the communists' ability to govern'. Lech Wałęsa's presidential campaign in 1990 supported an acceleration of change, going beyond Mazowiecki's 'clear limitations on de-communization'.⁵⁷ Soviet insider Grachev has remarked that this 'failure' of the communists represented 'a spectacular political setback for the East European "Gorbachevists" – Jaruzelski and Rakowski', whom he depicts as Gorbachev's 'closest political allies' in the region. Apparently, Gorbachev and his advisers tried to read the Polish developments as a 'special case' and as a 'weak link' due to several factors which included 'anti-Russian complexes', a prior history of Solidarity's role in 1980, and the importance of the Catholic church. Grachev viewed Gorbachev at this point as someone who was 'desperately' suggesting that Eastern Europe could still hold together, and possibly actually 'believed it'. Grachev's own view is that the situation was one of 'ambiguity' for Gorbachev. As instigator, new regimes owed their 'paternity' to Gorbachev, yet for him to admit this was tantamount to confessing that it had led to friends and *pro-perestroika* leaders being removed.⁵⁸

Were they 'revolutions'?

Writing in 1990, Milovan Djilas concluded that the outcomes in Eastern Europe could be 'understood and evaluated only if they are conceived of as revolutions'. He held that 'the very foundations of the system', namely 'the structures of power and ownership' were changing. Djilas viewed developments in line with Lenin's 'revolutionary situation' since 'those who are in power can no longer rule in the old ways, while those who are ruled no longer consent to be governed as they once were'.⁵⁹

To what extent can social scientific theories of revolution take on board the essential Soviet external role as pre-requisite, trigger and nourisher of East European revolutions? Key approaches include psychological theories of relative deprivation, as put forward by Ted Gurr; political conflict theories as formulated by Charles Tilly; a social values perspective advocated by Chalmers Johnson; and the more structural approach of Theda Skocpol. My own definition of 'revolution' is that it amounts to the overthrow of established political structures leading to fundamental change in the political process and in the political ideas of the leadership. Some theorists insist that violence is integral to the process or that radical change from above cannot constitute a revolution, but I do not necessarily

concur with these.⁶⁰ Essential is *fundamental change* in the nature of the system and ruling ideas, not necessarily the degree of turbulence.

In fact, most theories of revolution do not take adequate account of external actors or the significance of revolution within an empire. Gurr's stress on the importance of discontent and relative deprivation at a time of rising expectations is not a sufficient condition for revolution, even if a necessary one in some instances.⁶¹ Discontent can lead to politicisation and demands for change, but it may not necessarily do so, particularly in an authoritarian state socialist system. Furthermore, some coordination is required for successful action leading to a radical political result. In Tilly's political conflict approach, revolution is a form of collective action in which contenders fight for political sovereignty. Indeed, political conflict there was and it is one aspect of revolution.⁶² Moreover, many activists whether from above, as in Poland and Hungary, or from below, as in Romania, wanted sovereignty, but to grasp the entirety of the revolutionary process one needs to talk about more than organised groups fighting for political sovereignty. For a comprehensive understanding, we need to include broader historical, economic, social and political contexts. Conflict and violence do not guarantee revolution.

According to Johnson, revolution is the purposive implementation of a strategy of violence in order to affect a change in social structure. He argues that in a dis-synchronised society, the values of revolution are appealing to disorientated groups.⁶³ Successful revolution is a re-synchronisation of the social system's values and environment. Certainly we can say that social reorientation took place across Eastern Europe among some groups, but we are still left asking how much weight should we attach to this phenomenon? It was above all a series of political realignments. In sum, these perspectives ignore the immense complexity of the revolutions as components in a wider revolutionary *process* entailing the collapse of an empire.

Indeed, the external Soviet role was crucial to the dynamic – a factor that theories often overlook by a 'within the system' approach. A more complex framework, as adopted by Skocpol in her work on comparative revolutions, requires an inter-disciplinary analysis that is multivariate. She stresses that international contexts and developments at home and abroad 'affect the breakdown of state-organisations of old regimes and the build-up of new, revolutionary state organisations'.⁶⁴ 'Transition' is too tame a term for the sequences of events that ensued.⁶⁵ Rather, the process of revolution took place over four years from ignition to rupture, beginning in the USSR. In most states what resulted were 'self-limiting', even 'strange', revolutions in the assessment of Stefan Auer, with little or no violence.⁶⁶ Indeed, one is tempted to agree with Otto Kirkheimer's classic assessment of revolutions: despite having communalities, they can also be 'part of a unique conjunction of circumstances'.⁶⁷

Conclusions

The revolutions of 1989 were not what Gorbachev had wished for when he set out, as Robert H. Donaldson and Joseph L. Noguee put it, to turn 'little Brezhnevs' in Eastern Europe into 'little Gorbachevs'.⁶⁸ Some leaders had been considerably more Brezhnevite than others and had required more coaxing, regardless of Gorbachev's policy of non-intervention and being as 'hands off' as possible. Those more willing to proceed required the go-ahead from Moscow combined with the assurance that they would not be reprimanded. That newly elected reformers went beyond the confines of Gorbachevism and turned into 'little Yel'tsins' in their directions, supported by their own demonstrating publics, meant that ultimately Gorbachev was a geopolitical loser in the wider post-Soviet space, just as he became in 1990 and 1991 in the USSR. The exception of Romania, where a neo-communism under Ion Iliescu triumphed, still left Gorbachev a loser. For him 1989 was not the *annus mirabilis* that George Schöpflin has dubbed it.⁶⁹ What many, like Mette Skak, viewed as Gorbachev's 'pragmatic policy' towards Eastern Europe ultimately meant a pragmatism that backfired for its initiator.⁷⁰ Yakovlev puts the root of Gorbachev's failures in his balancing act at home between conservatives and reformers. Not wishing to lose the support of either camp, he lacked a 'definite position' of his own, resulting in a 'sad role' in which 'deep contradictions' complicated social hopes.⁷¹

As a crucial and adept reforming leader by intent, but transformational in outcome, Gorbachev's role in history was far-reaching and immense.⁷² Rey describes his diplomacy as one of 'a surprising mix of pragmatism, voluntarism and idealism – perhaps even of Utopia'.⁷³ There is widespread concurrence that his initiatives led to the end of the years of reciprocated hostility and mirror-image mutual condemnations that characterised the Cold War. An absolutely essential element in this dynamic and wide-ranging package of changes was Gorbachev's fresh 'unwillingness to support unreformed and unresponsive communist dictatorships'.⁷⁴ In Chernyaev's view, this led to 'the end of Yalta and Stalin's legacy in Europe'.⁷⁵

In sum, revolutions in Eastern Europe would not have occurred in 1989 in the way that they did without Gorbachev's foreign policy. Perhaps changes would have developed later within limits, or even more explosively depending on other events and policies. Speculation about this is futile. Gorbachev and all that followed from him ignited motors that would then run without him controlling the gears. Against my conclusion that the revolutions meant Gorbachev's policies 'lost' Eastern Europe, Palazchenko contends actually 'it was a victory of Gorbachev and his supporters over themselves, over the past in themselves – the most difficult victory anyone can achieve'. Thus, the 'ideological umbilical cord' was, eventually,

successfully cut.⁷⁶ Even Gorbachev in 1990 at the 28th party congress referred to a 'change' from the 'Stalinist model of socialism' to the arrival of a 'civil society of free people'.⁷⁷ Finally, it is worth observing an important contrast. Whereas nationalism in the USSR, particularly in the Baltic states, Ukraine and Georgia, was an essential ingredient in the drive for *perestroika*, sovereignty and ultimately independence,⁷⁸ this was less the case in Eastern Europe. Eric Hobsbawm has flagged up that nationalism was the 'beneficiary of these developments but not, in any serious sense, an important factor in bringing them about'.⁷⁹

Gorbachev's impact on systems epitomised by waning political legitimacy in the eyes of significant numbers of citizens, systems with histories of discontent, dissent, surveillance and intervention, was sufficient to spark fundamental changes in those contexts. Indeed, revolution came to systems which political scientists would characterise as suffering from crises of legitimacy, crises of political participation and crises of identity.⁸⁰ These crises provided fertile soil for Gorbachev's messages. The extent to which the consequences of the revolutions in 1989 actually addressed them is another matter.

Notes

- 1 E. Shevardnadze, *Moi vybor: v zashchitu demokratii i svobody* (Moscow, 1991), pp. 197–8.
- 2 See 'Bolgarskie protokoly', *Sovershenno sekretno*, 4 April 1992, p. 19.
- 3 A. Grachev, *Gorbachev's Gamble: Soviet Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 114–16.
- 4 A. Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, trans. and ed. R. D. English and E. Tucker (University Park, 2000), p. 61.
- 5 Grachev, *Gorbachev's Gamble*, pp. 114–16.
- 6 *Pravda*, 14 March 1985.
- 7 M. S. Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (London, 1996), pp. 464–6, 483.
- 8 Chernyaev, *My Six Years*, p. 36.
- 9 O. Bogomolov, 'Soglasovanie ekonomicheskikh interesov i politiki pri sotsializme', *Kommunist*, no. 10 (1985), p. 82.
- 10 G. Shakhnazarov, *S vozhdiami i bez nikh* (Moscow, 2001), pp. 277–8.
- 11 V. V. Kusin, 'Gorbachev and Eastern Europe', *Problems of Communism*, vol. 35, no. 1 (1986), pp. 39–53.
- 12 *Bakinskii rabochii*, 27 April 2005.
- 13 *Pravda*, 26 October 1985, p. 6.
- 14 *Bakinskii rabochii*, 24 April 1985.
- 15 Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, pp. 464–7; *Bakinskii rabochii*, 27 April 1985.
- 16 *Bakinskii rabochii*, 16 November 1985.
- 17 *Pravda* 13 December 1985.
- 18 *Pravda*, 14 March 1985.

- 19 Chernyaev, *My Six Years*, p. 35.
- 20 P. Palazchenko, *My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze: The Memoir of a Soviet Interpreter* (University Park, 1977), p. 151.
- 21 For more details, see A. Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 212–20.
- 22 K. Dawisha, *Eastern Europe, Gorbachev and Reform* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 163.
- 23 M. Waller, *The End of the Communist Power Monopoly* (Manchester, 1993), p. 215.
- 24 'Vystuplenia na X s"ezde Pol'skoi ob"edinennoi rabochei partii', in M. S. Gorbachev, *Izbrannye rechi i stat'i*, vol. 3 (Moscow, 1987), pp. 464–73.
- 25 N. N. Petro and A. Z. Rubinstein, *Russian Foreign Policy: From Empire to Nation State* (New York, 1997), p. 179.
- 26 'Vystuplenie', in Gorbachev, *Izbrannye rechi i stat'i*, p. 471.
- 27 'Interv"iu pol'skomu televideniiu: 30 iunia 1986 goda', in Gorbachev, *Izbrannye rechi i stat'i*, p. 474.
- 28 Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, pp. 466–7.
- 29 M. Buckley, *Redefining Russian Society and Polity* (Boulder, 1993), pp. 17–43.
- 30 Grachev, *Gorbachev's Gamble*, p. 116.
- 31 Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, pp. 467, 469.
- 32 Grachev, *Gorbachev's Gamble*, p. 117.
- 33 Quoted in Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, p. 249.
- 34 Grachev, *Gorbachev's Gamble*, p. 116.
- 35 Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, p. 249.
- 36 Grachev, *Gorbachev's Gamble*, p. 118.
- 37 Quoted in Grachev, *Gorbachev's Gamble*, pp. 119–20.
- 38 *Soviet News*, 28 January 1987, p. 33.
- 39 Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, pp. 467–8, 476, 482–4.
- 40 Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, pp. 483–4.
- 41 *Bakinskii rabochii*, 9 December 1988; *Soviet News*, 14 December 1988, pp. 460–2.
- 42 *Soviet News*, 14 December 1988, p. 462.
- 43 For details, see *Bakinskii rabochii*, 22–30 June and 1–6 July 1988; also *19th All-Union Conference of the CPSU: Documents and Materials* (Moscow, 1988).
- 44 *Bakinskii rabochii*, 1–4 December 1988.
- 45 V. N. Berezovskii and N. I. Krotov (eds), *Neformal'naia rossiiia* (Moscow, 1990) and Buckley, *Redefining*, pp. 28–36.
- 46 *Soviet News*, 6 November 1985, p. 409.
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‘When your neighbour changes his wallpaper’: The ‘Gorbachev factor’ and the collapse of the German Democratic Republic

Peter Grieder

Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) on 12 March 1985.¹ His subsequent policies of *glasnost* (‘openness’) and *perestroika* (‘restructuring’) aimed to rejuvenate communism but ended up destroying it. This chapter will assess the part he played in the downfall of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), also known as East Germany. Although scholars agree that his role was important, not all give him equal credit. According to Jonathan Grix, they have overemphasised the external factors in the country’s collapse.² Arvid Nelson downplays Gorbachev’s contribution, arguing that a ‘combination of economic and ecological decline and increased popular awareness’ condemned the state to death.³ Hannelore Horn contends that the primary reason for the republic’s demise was its ‘internal weakness’.⁴ While it is true that the *failure* of the self-proclaimed ‘Workers’ and Peasants’ Power’ can partly be attributed to indigenous factors, *collapse* could only occur once the Soviet Union had withdrawn support. On 28 July 1970, the then CPSU leader, Leonid Brezhnev, told the future General Secretary of the GDR’s ruling Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), Erich Honecker:⁵ ‘After all, we have troops in your country ... the GDR cannot exist without us, without the Soviet Union, its power and strength.’⁶ The ‘Gorbachev factor’ was strongest in East Germany because, unlike the other Warsaw Pact members, it ultimately depended on the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) for its very existence as a separate state.

The impact of Gorbachev on the GDR, 1985–89

Shortly after Gorbachev’s accession to power, Erich Mielke, the Minister for State Security of the GDR, issued directive No. 2/85 on ‘prevention, disclosure and combating of underground political activity’. Controlling

dissenters would now be achieved by 'wholesale surveillance'.⁷ Between 25 February and 6 March 1986, SED General Secretary Honecker attended the 27th congress of the CPSU in Moscow. In his opening address, Gorbachev branded the Brezhnev epoch 'years of stagnation' and called for far-reaching reform of the economic system.⁸ A few weeks later, while participating in the SED's 11th congress in East Berlin, Gorbachev told Honecker that he sensed the East German leader 'had been irritated by something' in Moscow and 'showed a certain reserve regarding internal questions of development in the Soviet Union'. Honecker tried to downplay the differences, but admitted that he was no longer using the slogan 'to learn from the Soviet Union is to learn how to win'.⁹ When Gorbachev suggested that the GDR might also benefit from 'restructuring' its economy, Honecker's response, as reported by former SED Politburo member, Günter Schabowski, was contemptuous: 'The young man has only been making policy for a year and already he finds it necessary to open his big mouth! While at the start of his period in office there were still three grams of meat in the shop window, now there is none to be seen at all.'¹⁰ Apparently, Gorbachev became a 'taboo topic' at SED Politburo meetings.¹¹

As Mary Buckley points out in [chapter 3](#) of this volume, 'Gorbachev's dilemma was that he wanted East Europeans to emulate his inspiration, but hesitated to push them too hard since that went against the spirit of his policies'. Even so, his statements that each Communist Party was responsible for the situation inside its own country implied that the SED could no longer depend on the Soviet Army if severe unrest destabilised the 'Workers' and Peasants' Power'. The Ministry for State Security (MfS), better known as the Stasi, responded by intensifying its domestic spying even further. Mielke's directive 6/86 established a new apparatus over and above the active web of informants. MfS 'officers on special assignment' were given strategic posts so that vital data and assets could be defended against 'hostile' elements. For the first time ever, constraints were removed from the Stasi's snooping on the party itself.¹²

The prospect that elements inside the SED would start clamouring for liberalisation was particularly worrisome for the leadership. After all, the party was the linchpin of the socialist dictatorship. It is a common misconception that there was a clear dichotomy between the party and the people in the GDR. Some East German communists were as animated, if not more so, than their fellow countrymen about reform in the Soviet Union.¹³ Others, however, were much more critical. A few summaries of monthly reports submitted to Honecker by district party leaders suggest that there was something of a generational divide on this issue, with older comrades tending to take more sceptical positions.¹⁴ Nevertheless, as Matthew Stibbe shows in [chapter 11](#), younger party activists could still be

encouraged in their pro-Gorbachev views through the enthusiasm shown for the Soviet leader on the part of a small minority of active communist veterans with a long standing in the labour movement such as the historian Jürgen Kuczynski.

Soon the consequences of *glasnost* began to spill over into East Germany. On 3 October 1986, Honecker held talks with Gorbachev in Moscow. He complained about visiting Soviet cinematographers who had allegedly tried to mobilise the Association of GDR Film-Makers against the East German government: 'The Soviet comrades have their problems. The SED favours good cooperation. But the problems of the Soviet Union cannot be brought into the GDR.' He also expressed his indignation that the Russian poet, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, had been allowed to speak out in support of German reunification during a trip to West Berlin. All references to this theme had been deleted from the GDR's 1974 constitution. Furthermore, the poet had backed claims in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) about the existence of a 'united German culture', directly contradicting SED policy that a separate socialist nation existed in the GDR. Honecker was similarly incensed by the remarks of another Soviet poet in West Berlin, Andrei Voznesensky, that 'writers were the conscience of the nation'. Such views, he said, were 'on the same track as FRG propaganda' and 'could quickly be utilised' by 'political deviants' in his own country. The SED General Secretary told Gorbachev: 'The appearance of such writers on American-financed television and radio in West Berlin is counter-revolutionary ... It is a matter of sending people to West Berlin who are steadfast ... For us it is important to fight on one and not two fronts.' Although the East German regime had given up jamming western radio and television signals, it did not want what in its view were anti-GDR messages to be spread by Soviet citizens via these media. Gorbachev failed to give Honecker the assurances he sought, telling him that 'in principle' the writers concerned were 'not bad people'.¹⁵

At a watershed CPSU Central Committee plenum in January 1987, Gorbachev called for the democratisation of the party and society. 'We need democracy like air to breathe', he declared.¹⁶ This was anathema to Honecker who had claimed in 1986 that the East German population lived 'in one of the freest countries in the world'.¹⁷ His public pronouncements reflected those he made in private. Speaking with CPSU Central Committee Secretary Anatoly Dobrynin on 20 January 1987, Honecker insisted that 'socialist democracy under the conditions of the GDR was proving itself better [and] more effective than bourgeois democracy'. Therefore 'concessions to bourgeois democracy would not be permitted under any circumstances. Socialist democracy in the GDR was much more highly developed than democracy in the FRG'.¹⁸ Honecker then took the previously unheard-of decision to censor publication of the CPSU Central

Committee plenum proceedings in East Germany.¹⁹ Consequently, they became dissident literature.

On 6 February 1987, the SED's ideological spokesman, Kurt Hager, wrote to Honecker about a conversation he had recently held with Georgy Shakhnazarov, Deputy Head of the International Relations Department of the CPSU Central Committee and Gorbachev's adviser on Eastern Europe. Shakhnazarov had commented that while the GDR was ahead of the USSR economically, the Soviet Union was ahead of the GDR in terms of 'socialist democracy'. Hager told his interlocutor that he was obviously 'not in the picture' about the 'nature and functioning' of 'democracy' in East Germany.²⁰ In an interview with the West German magazine *Stern*, published on 9 April 1987, Hager cited the party's slogan 'work together, plan together and govern together!', emphasising that 'every third citizen' exercised 'an honorary function in the management of state and society'. This high level of popular participation, he averred, was 'real democracy', unlike the capitalist variety.²¹ Hager continued to maintain that the GDR had been a genuine 'People's Democracy' more than two years after its collapse.²²

Honecker argued that he had already carried out his own 'restructuring' on taking over from Walter Ulbricht in 1971. This had entailed centralising the economy and nationalising the remaining private and semi-state-owned businesses – the opposite to what Gorbachev was proposing. In his *Stern* interview, Hager made the SED Politburo's hostility to *glasnost* and *perestroika* absolutely clear. If your neighbour changes the wallpaper in his apartment, he asked, would you feel obliged to do the same?²³ On 20 October 1987 it passed a resolution stipulating that in future 'the speeches of CPSU comrades' would only 'be published in abridged or summarised form'.²⁴ From early 1988, the SED leadership attempted to defuse the 'Gorbachev factor' by increasing repression still further.²⁵ It even sought to distance itself from Gorbachev's policies by coining the slogan 'socialism in the colours of the GDR'.²⁶ In his memoirs, former SED Politburo member, Werner Eberlein, compared *glasnost* to a destructive river which swept away 'fertile, alluvial land' along with everything 'old' and 'obsolete'.²⁷

Honecker's determination to resist democratisation has sometimes been blamed for his country's demise. Here it is worth recalling Alexis de Tocqueville's observation 'that the most critical moment for bad governments is the one which witnesses their first steps toward reform'.²⁸ As an insecure Cold War polity bordering the magnetic FRG, the GDR was congenitally incapable of sustaining political liberalisation. Therein lay its tragedy. The 'national question' was the genie that a 'liberalised' SED regime and its Soviet patrons would have had to keep firmly in the bottle. Even historians who point to a process of 'normalisation' in East Germany or seek to demonstrate that it enjoyed a significant degree

of popular acceptance agree that the state's stability was precarious.²⁹ On both occasions when liberalisation was initiated (in 1953 and 1989) its existence was called into question. SED leaders were permanently traumatised by the popular uprising of 17 June 1953, which would have consigned the fledgling GDR to the dustbin of history if Soviet tanks had not intervened. Mark Allinson, an opponent of the thesis that East Germany was illegitimate, recently concluded that 'had an international catalyst permitted regime change in the GDR in 1977, it seems certain that this opportunity would have been seized as willingly then as proved to be the case in 1989'.³⁰ This in what was supposed to be the most successful decade of the country's existence! The Soviet diplomat, Valentin Falin, a specialist on Germany and a staunch supporter of the GDR, retrospectively claimed that East German backing for the 'Workers' and Peasants' Power' never exceeded 30 per cent and frequently fell far lower.³¹ According to Thomas Lindenberger, it was 'an always precarious dictatorship' predicated on a 'tacit minimal consensus'.³²

None of the East European satellites were likely to sustain political liberalisation in the long run, but the GDR was least able to do so. Poland and Hungary adopted a pro-Gorbachev stance and instigated reforms earlier, yet were the first to shake off communism, as Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe show in their introduction to this volume. Poland and Hungary without communism were still Poland and Hungary but the GDR without communism lacked inner purpose because it was an ideological state. This fundamental truth was elucidated by Otto Reinhold, Rector of the SED Central Committee's Academy of Social Sciences, on 19 August 1989: 'What entitlement to existence would a capitalist GDR have alongside a capitalist Federal Republic? None, of course.'³³ For Honecker, the fact that East Germany enjoyed the highest living standards in the Soviet bloc was proof enough that reform of his beloved workers' and peasants' paradise was unnecessary. Unfortunately for him, however, East Germans compared themselves to West Germans, not Czechs, Poles, Hungarians or Russians. Throughout the 1980s, the GDR sank deep into crisis, falling further behind the Federal Republic. The increasing numbers of East Germans seeking to emigrate to the FRG underlined the latter's political and economic magnetism. Since there were no reformers in the SED Politburo and no communist leader had ever resigned voluntarily anyway, the argument that Honecker could have saved the GDR by standing down in favour of a younger, more liberal-minded leader before 1989 lacks credibility. The Soviet Union had more popular legitimacy than the GDR, yet disappeared from the map within fifteen months of its German satellite. History will record that Honecker understood the destabilising consequences of *glasnost* and *perestroika* better than Gorbachev did.

Instead of initiating reforms, the SED leadership took the extraordinary step of proscribing Soviet articles, journals and films. According to Burleigh, 'a Berlin newspaper called *Die Kirche* was forbidden to republish an article on religion from *Moscow News*. In 1988 the paper was censored fifteen times'.³⁴ Honecker personally decreed that three issues of the magazine *New Times*, which drew parallels between Stalin and Hitler, should be prohibited.³⁵ Films such as *The Commissar* and *The Theme* simply vanished from cinema programmes. The anti-Stalinist movie, *Repentance*, was sharply criticised and shown only to restricted audiences.³⁶ In September 1988 Honecker visited Moscow for talks with Gorbachev. He used the occasion to lodge another protest about translated Soviet publications disseminating anti-socialist views in the GDR. Such things were 'unbearable for us', he complained. Gorbachev was dismissive, replying that while he did not agree with the contents of these journals, he 'would continue to work with them'; they 'would certainly not trigger a putsch in the GDR which had, after all, withstood far worse attacks for decades'.³⁷ Unable to prevail on the CPSU leader to halt the spread of 'enemy propaganda', Honecker banned the German-language edition of the Soviet news digest, *Sputnik*. Following its prohibition on 18 November 1988, the SED was inundated with furious letters of protest, some of them from party members.³⁸ Six days earlier, the regime had forbidden an international ecclesiastical conference in Buckow because it planned to discuss Gorbachev's reforms.³⁹ Unprecedented, thinly veiled references to the growing social crisis in the USSR began to appear in the GDR media.⁴⁰

Yet an increasingly beleaguered SED leadership was unable to inoculate its population against the democratic virus emanating from Moscow. On 3 February 1987, the Central Evaluation and Information Group (ZAIG) of the MfS had compiled a report on the first reactions of the East German population to the January plenum of the CPSU Central Committee. 'The creation of a more open and critical atmosphere in all areas of the GDR's societal life' was regarded as 'the most important lesson' and 'urgent task'.⁴¹ Meeting with Alexander Yakovlev, the CPSU's Central Committee Secretary for Propaganda, Culture and Foreign Policy, on 27 January 1989, the Head of the SED's International Relations Department, Hermann Axen, complained that the west was using the slogans of *perestroika* as 'poisoned arrows' against the GDR.⁴² Much to the chagrin of Honecker, a West Berlin radio station called *Glasnost* was transmitting propaganda around the clock into the 'Workers' and Peasants' State'.⁴³ The dictator's nightmare of fighting an ideological war on two fronts – one against the 'class enemy' in the west and another against the communist motherland in the east – had become a daily reality.

For the vast majority of East Germans, Gorbachev personified hope and salvation. According to data collated by Leipzig's Central Institute for

Youth Research in April and May 1989, 95 per cent of students declared themselves 'sympathetic' to Gorbachev and his policies; of these 64 per cent pronounced themselves 'very sympathetic'. Student opinion on this issue apparently reflected that of the country at large. As the survey noted, '[t]he basic tenor is: "We need *perestroika* and *glasnost* for the GDR"'. Whereas 23 per cent of students had claimed to feel a 'strong association' with the SED in 1983, this total had dropped to 14 per cent in 1988 and 7 per cent in 1989. The crisis was ostensibly infecting the party itself, since the proportion of SED members among the student population had increased during this period.⁴⁴ Gorbachev's policies also appeared to be contributing to a precipitous decline in loyalty to the GDR among young people generally. According to a different poll from the same institute in 1985, 51 per cent professed to 'identify completely' with their state, 43 per cent 'did so with reservations' and only 6 per cent 'identified hardly or not at all'. But in 1988, the year democracy began to develop in the USSR, those who said they 'identified completely' fell from 28 per cent in May to 18 per cent in October; those who 'did so with reservations' decreased from 61 per cent to 54 per cent and those who 'identified hardly or not at all' rose from 11 per cent to 28 per cent. Although these figures may not have been entirely reliable, they were indicative of a trend.⁴⁵ Speaking with the Soviet ambassador to his country, Vyacheslav Kochemasov, on 1 February 1988, Honecker observed: 'In the GDR there are also people who now claim, under the ideological influence of the West and with reference to critical publications in the Soviet Union, that socialism is a failed experiment'.⁴⁶

It was not just Gorbachev's domestic reforms that were destabilising the GDR. His foreign policy also began to pose an existential threat. Heavily burdened by Cold War defence expenditure, the Soviet empire had become overstretched. The Kremlin therefore decided that its military presence in Eastern Europe weakened rather than strengthened Soviet security, and at a CPSU Central Committee plenum in February 1988, Gorbachev acknowledged the right of every nation-state to 'choose freely its social and political system'.⁴⁷ Naturally, at this time he still hoped that the totalitarian dictatorships in the region, which had discredited socialism and exacerbated tensions with the West, would be replaced by reform-communist regimes. But this was a political preference rather than a strategic imperative. Addressing the United Nations on 7 December 1988, Gorbachev replaced a class-based foreign policy with one founded on the common interests of humanity. He reiterated the right of all peoples to choose freely their own social system, granting this right to Germans as well.⁴⁸ Without consulting the Soviet High Command, he then announced swingeing reductions in Soviet forces stationed in Eastern Europe, including the GDR.⁴⁹ Although the SED leadership had supported Gorbachev's peace offensive until this point, it rejected his 'fundamental reconceptualisation'

of relations with the West.⁵⁰ Gorbachev's disarmament initiatives sparked impassioned debate within the SED Politburo, with Hager expressing the fear that unilateral action on the part of socialist countries would destabilise the Soviet bloc.⁵¹ Writing to the GDR's Defence Minister, Heinz Keßler, on 17 January 1989, Axen expressed his uneasiness at the Soviet plan: 'more than ever all further proposals of the USSR or Warsaw Pact must give utmost consideration to the national security interests of *all* alliance partners. It must be not be permitted that the external and thereby the internal security of the small socialist countries furthest to the West are endangered'.⁵² By early 1989 the Soviet neighbour had done much more than just change the wallpaper in his apartment; in the name of building a new 'common European home' he had begun restructuring the whole housing block.

Gorbachev and the 1989 revolution in East Germany

Without Gorbachev, the 1989 revolutions could not have happened. Gorbachev's refusal to overrule Hungary's decision to start dismantling the Iron Curtain along its frontier with Austria on 2 May plunged the GDR into its deepest refugee crisis since the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. On 6 July 1989, he visited the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, declaring that the USSR would not prevent reform on the eastern side of the continent.⁵³ Then, at a Warsaw Pact summit in Bucharest between 7 and 8 July, he renounced the already defunct Brezhnev Doctrine, which had legitimised Soviet interference in the internal affairs of its satellites if socialism was considered under threat there.⁵⁴ Satellite governments were now accountable to their own populations and not to Moscow. On 25 October, the Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman, Gennady Gerasimov, would christen the new policy the 'Sinatra Doctrine' after the American singer's ballad 'My Way'.⁵⁵ Over the summer, Gorbachev permitted Poland and Hungary to move towards pluralist democracy, thereby showing East Germans that emancipation from the USSR would be tolerated.

Needless to say, Honecker remained implacably opposed to Gorbachev's policies. In May 1989 he met Gustáv Husák, President of the neighbouring Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. If supporting 'Marxist-Leninism' and 'Internationalism' was 'conservative', Husák avowed, then the GDR and Czechoslovakia were members of the 'conservative camp'. Honecker 'agreed completely', describing the label 'conservative' as 'an absolute honour'. Both their parties, he affirmed, were 'solving problems from Marxist-Leninist positions'.⁵⁶ At the July Warsaw Pact summit in Bucharest, Honecker planned an unprecedented attempt to 'correct the Gorbachev course' together with his 'conservative' allies in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Romania. He suspected that the Soviet leader's concept of a 'common

European home' would undermine socialism. But Honecker was unable to make his speech because he developed gall-stone colic and had to be flown back to East Berlin. Over the summer, while incapacitated by illness, he instructed his wife Margot to help marshal the anti-Gorbachev forces. To do so, she travelled to North Korea and Romania, where Kim Il Sung and Nicolae Ceaușescu assured her of their support.⁵⁷ The Honeckers regarded the Soviet leader as a 'revisionist' (one of the worst insults in the communist lexicon) and a 'traitor' to socialism. As the SED General Secretary remarked to Heinz Kessler: 'Either the man has no idea about politics or he is looking after the business of others, whoever they may be!'⁵⁸

Gorbachev wrote in his memoirs that when he attended the GDR's 40th anniversary celebrations in October 1989, the country reminded him 'of an overheated boiler with the lid tightly closed'.⁵⁹ Large but peaceful anti-government demonstrations in numerous towns, including the capital, were violently dispersed by state security forces.⁶⁰ 'Gorby mania' gripped not just the protestors but also the putatively loyal youngsters who marched in East Berlin's official torchlight procession on 6 October. Much to the discomfort of Honecker, who was standing next to Gorbachev on the dais, they called out 'Perestroika! Gorbachev! Help us!' The First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party, Mieczysław Rakowski, reportedly turned to the Soviet leader and said: 'Mikhail Sergeyevich, do you understand these slogans they are shouting? ... They're demanding: "Gorbachev, save us once more!" These are Party activists! This is the end!'⁶¹

Following the military parade on 7 October, the day of the anniversary itself, Gorbachev spoke with East Germans informally, telling them: 'Those who come late will be punished by history.' But he did not stop there. He also seemed to encourage them to oppose their own government, undermining SED claims about democracy in the process: 'If you want democracy, take it and it will be yours'.⁶² In a private conversation, Gorbachev warned Honecker that he and his party 'had to seize the initiative, otherwise demagogues could suggest other ideas. He knew from his own experience that one must not come too late'. Honecker, however, emphasised external threats and the GDR's achievements. In a coded criticism of *perestroika*, he observed that during his recent trip to the Soviet city of Magnitogorsk, his advisers had visited a store and reported that the shelves were empty of salt, soup, flour and matches.⁶³ His message was unmistakeable: you lecture me on reform but cannot even provide your population with basic goods.⁶⁴

Immediately afterwards, Gorbachev met with the entire SED Politburo and told them: 'One must ... heed the impulses of the times ... Our experiences and those of Poland and Hungary have convinced us: if the party does not react to life, it is condemned ... We have only one choice:

to move forwards decisively, otherwise we will be defeated by life itself.'⁶⁵ Whether he was offering his hosts prescient counsel or simply reflecting on his own experiences, his remarks spelled the end of Honecker's political career. At dinner that evening, the Soviet leader denied him the customary comradely bear hug.⁶⁶ When it was time for Gorbachev to fly home, the East German dictator did not accompany him to the airport.⁶⁷ It was to be their final meeting. On 18 October, Honecker was relieved of all his functions and replaced as SED General Secretary by his deputy, Egon Krenz. During discussions with Gorbachev in Moscow on 1 November, Krenz recalled the Soviet leader's fateful words, saying they had provided the crucial catalyst for change. Gorbachev commented that if Honecker had introduced reforms some two or three years earlier, the crisis in the GDR would not have become so critical: 'Comrade Honecker obviously considered himself as "Number 1" in socialism, or even the whole world. He no longer saw the reality of what was happening.'⁶⁸ Krenz's policy of limited liberalisation only whetted the popular appetite for more.

Gorbachev's refusal to countenance violence was the main reason why the revolution in East Germany did not culminate in a massacre. After resigning as Soviet foreign minister in December 1990, Eduard Shevardnadze testified that there had been 'strong voices' in the CPSU, army and secret police calling on Gorbachev to deploy force in the GDR during August and October 1989.⁶⁹ On 30 September, Falin, the Head of the CPSU's International Department, claims to have informed the Mayor of West Berlin, Walter Momper, that the Red Army would not intervene in the domestic affairs of the country.⁷⁰ In 1991, Yakovlev reported that in the second half of 1989, Gorbachev ordered Soviet forces stationed there to remain in their barracks.⁷¹ Whether or not Gorbachev gave such an order, his policy of non-intervention was clear.⁷² This demoralised the SED leaders. Since the GDR was so dependent on the USSR, it was bound tightly into the latter's security structures. Consequently, the SED, National People's Army (NVA) and Stasi were less able to instigate a crackdown of their own. The NVA, for example, had never been allowed its own General Staff.⁷³ According to some sources, the Commander-in-Chief of the Warsaw Pact directed the Commander-in-Chief of the NVA to withdraw his soldiers from Leipzig and other East German cities.⁷⁴ As Falin points out, even if Soviet forces remained neutral, they would be accused of supporting violence.⁷⁵ On 21 October 1989, Mielke warned his MfS top brass that the GDR could not 'distance itself from the Soviet Union'.⁷⁶ Four days later, Gorbachev proclaimed that the USSR had 'no right, moral or political' to 'interfere' in the affairs of Eastern Europe.⁷⁷

When he met the Soviet leader on 1 November, Krenz stated his determination to prevent a 'mass breakthrough' at the Berlin Wall. As for Gorbachev, he wanted to keep 'diverse human contacts' between the

GDR and FRG 'under control' with a view to 'steering' them. He called on the SED to find a way for relatives on both sides of the German divide to visit each another. The intention was to gain some concessions from the Federal Republic in return. Krenz was worried about the implications of Gorbachev's emphasis on 'general human values'. 'Freeing foreign policy from ideology', he said, presented the GDR with particular problems in its relations with West Germany because it meant 'giving up the defence of socialism. Questions such as the wall and the border regime with the FRG would be posed anew. The GDR finds itself in the complicated situation of having to defend things which no longer fit with the times but are still necessary'.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, on the night of 9 November 1989, a paralysed SED leadership allowed the Berlin Wall to fall. This serendipitous event had not been planned or predicted by anyone, yet it directly affected the interests of the Four Powers in the city.

Next day, Gorbachev made an urgent telephone call to West German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, asking whether there was any truth in reports that infuriated crowds were preparing to attack Soviet Army positions in Berlin. Kohl assured him that there was no truth whatsoever in such reports; the mood was one of a 'family party'. It subsequently transpired that Gorbachev had been wilfully misled by enemies of his policy inside the KGB and Stasi, who wished to launch a military crackdown.⁷⁹ That the CPSU General Secretary chose to believe Kohl rather than the two most formidable secret police organisations of the Soviet bloc probably ensured that the wall remained open. Shevardnadze later claimed that Gorbachev's adversaries in the party, and particularly the army, wanted 'to line up the strike forces and barrage divisions along the borders, and start the tank engines'. In the GDR's Soviet Embassy, Falin is said to have 'threatened privately' that 'we will send a million troops who will close the border again'.⁸⁰ Gorbachev, however, quickly endorsed the historic turning point in Berlin, instructing his government to bolster Krenz. To this end, Shevardnadze praised the new frontier arrangements in the city, while Gerasimov appealed for all Allied forces to uphold a policy of non-intervention. Soviet troops in East Germany, the latter stated, were imbued with a strong sense of military discipline.⁸¹ On 13 November, the reform communist, Hans Modrow, became prime minister of the GDR. The demise of what the SED used to call 'the anti-fascist protective rampart' gave a huge impetus to the revolution. Now demonstrators stopped calling for reform of the 'Workers' and Peasants' Power' and began demanding unification with the FRG.

At his summit meeting with US President George H. W. Bush in Malta on 2 and 3 December 1989, Gorbachev repeated that force would not be deployed to keep the East European communists in office.⁸² Meanwhile, the SED dictatorship began to unravel. The party's 'leading role' was

excised from the country's constitution on 1 December. Two days later, Krenz resigned as General Secretary, along with the entire Politburo. On 6 December, he also resigned as Chairman of the State Council. In the same month, the FRG magazine, *Der Spiegel*, conducted a public opinion survey in East Germany which found that Gorbachev was more popular than any GDR or FRG politician.⁸³

Gorbachev and German reunification

It is often said that German reunification was inevitable, but some forget that it only became inevitable after Gorbachev consented to it.⁸⁴ Accepting the fall of the SED was one thing, allowing the GDR to join the FRG was quite another. After all, with its 'largest foreign contingent' of 350,000 troops stationed in East Germany,⁸⁵ the Soviet Union could certainly have preserved the jewel of its imperial crown. Until the late 1980s, the Kremlin regarded the GDR as the pillar of the USSR's influence in Europe, paid for with the blood of Soviet soldiers during the Second World War. In the autumn of 1989, Gorbachev did not yet envisage giving it up, hoping instead that the republic could be reformed. During their meeting on 1 November, Krenz drew the CPSU General Secretary's attention to the difference between East Germany and the other socialist bloc countries: 'in certain respects', he said, 'the GDR was the child of the Soviet Union' and the father had to recognise his 'paternity'. Gorbachev reassured Krenz that German reunification 'was not a problem of actual politics today'.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, at the Malta summit in early December, Bush and his advisers correctly surmised that Gorbachev was 'malleable' on the issue.⁸⁷ By 6 December, the day Krenz resigned all his state offices, Gorbachev was winning the French President, François Mitterrand, round to reunification. When they met in Kiev, Gorbachev told him that humiliating Germany was 'counterproductive'; the German people were 'entitled to unity' and the moment had arrived 'to prepare the framework for a united Germany'.⁸⁸

During talks with Modrow in Moscow on 30 January 1990, Gorbachev declined to guarantee the future survival of the GDR.⁸⁹ Instead, he declared to an astonished media afterwards: 'Among the Germans in East and West as well as the Four Power representatives, there is a certain agreement that German unification has never been doubted by anyone.'⁹⁰ On 10 February, Kohl also visited the Soviet capital with his foreign minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher. It was here that Gorbachev gave the 'green light' for reunification, the internal aspects of which were to be decided by the two German republics.⁹¹ In so doing, he sounded the death knell of the 'Workers' and Peasants' Power'. Eberlein, among others, would later claim that Gorbachev simply sold off the GDR.⁹² Shortly before the 10 February meeting, the West German government had agreed to supply

thousands of tonnes of relief to the crisis-stricken USSR, with a subsidy of DM 220 million. Yet as Timothy Garton Ash argues, it would 'be quite absurd to suggest that German unity was bought for 52,000 tonnes of beef'.⁹³ Gorbachev concurs, dismissing all such allegations as 'nonsense' and describing himself as a 'politician', not a 'trader'. According to him, he 'gave the GDR away' to the German people in return for a new cooperative relationship with the Soviet Union.⁹⁴

Within a few days of the 10 February meeting, the '2 + 4' formula⁹⁵ for negotiations on the external aspects of the process was announced at a summit of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and Warsaw Pact leaders in Ottawa. The centre-right 'Alliance for Germany' won the first and final free elections in the GDR on 18 March 1990 with a promise to join the FRG as soon as possible. Then the reunification train began to accelerate. When Kohl and Genscher visited the Soviet Union again between 14 and 16 July, Gorbachev formally agreed to Germany's reunification within NATO. Representatives of the GDR were not even invited to this meeting. It was probably here that the Cold War ended. As Beschloss and Talbott point out, 'the division of Germany had been at the heart of the nearly half-century-long division of Europe'.⁹⁶ The Warsaw Pact had been established in 1955 with the 'Workers' and Peasants' State' as a member in response to the FRG's accession to the Atlantic Alliance. On 3 October 1990, Germany was reunited as a liberal democracy within the European Community.

Why, then, did Gorbachev make these momentous decisions? According to some scholars, he had little choice but to play 'the good loser'.⁹⁷ Certainly the Soviet leader was impelled by the logic of his own pronouncements. He could hardly deny the wish of Germans to unite after declaring that all peoples had the right to choose their own destinies. At the Washington summit on 31 May 1990, he said that it was for the Germans themselves to decide which military alliances they joined.⁹⁸ Effectively, this was an admission that an enlarged FRG would be a member of NATO. Recognising reality and conceding gracefully are key attributes of statesmanship. Yet they entailed a considerable political cost for Gorbachev. Shevardnadze cited contemporary Soviet public opinion surveys showing that approximately 97 per cent of Russians could not envisage Germany as part of the Atlantic Alliance.⁹⁹ This really mattered because of Gorbachev's democratic reforms and tumbling poll ratings.

But the 'glorious loser' narrative is one-sided. As Winston Churchill once wrote: 'A Statesman should always try to do what he believes is best in the long view for his country, and he should not be dissuaded from so acting by having to divorce himself from a great body of doctrine to which he formerly sincerely adhered.'¹⁰⁰ The CPSU leader divorced himself from the doctrine of class struggle that had so distorted the Kremlin's dealings

with the rest of the world. A military intervention in the GDR would have refrozen the Cold War he had worked so hard to thaw, with deleterious consequences for the Soviet Union. Gorbachev thought other European leaders wanted him 'to play the villain of the piece' and prevent German reunification.¹⁰¹ He was far-sighted enough to realise that this would jeopardise German–Soviet relations. He was also desperate to focus his attention on the gathering crisis in the USSR itself. Pulling the Red Army out of eastern Germany would save a substantial sum of money.¹⁰²

Gorbachev and Shevardnadze no longer regarded NATO as their enemy, particularly after its mission was redefined at a London summit on 5 July 1990. They also secured vital concessions. The FRG military was limited to 370,000 soldiers, significantly fewer than the 500,000-strong West German Bundeswehr.¹⁰³ Germany was reunited within her 1945 borders, forswearing all nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.¹⁰⁴ In addition, Kohl paid DM 15 billion in grants and loans¹⁰⁵ to enable the Soviet Army to leave eastern Germany by 1994.¹⁰⁶ NATO authority would only be established in the former GDR once all Soviet soldiers had gone.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, Kohl promised comprehensive 'economic and technical assistance', and concluded a friendship treaty with the USSR on 9 November 1990.¹⁰⁸ As the European Community's wealthiest member, the FRG was in a position to support *perestroika*, whereas the technologically less-developed GDR teetered on the edge of bankruptcy. According to Grosser, '[t]he sum of transfer payments and credits for the Soviet Union agreed upon in 1990–1 exceeded 50 billion DM'.¹⁰⁹ Shumaker rightly contends that Gorbachev and Shevardnadze considered the final reunification settlement 'consistent with their new vision of Soviet interests'.¹¹⁰ It was an ideological but not a strategic defeat for the USSR.

Not only communist hardliners but also moderates saw things very differently. A furious debate raged inside the CPSU about German reunification. Politburo member Yegor Ligachev warned of another 'Munich' in February 1990 – a reference to the appeasement of Hitler in 1938.¹¹¹ Falin, his number two, Nikolai Portugalov, and Georgi Kornienko, former deputy to the erstwhile Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko, 'all demanded that Yakovlev and others "stop" Gorbachev and Shevardnadze from handing Germany over to the Americans'.¹¹² Opposition to German reunification climaxed at the 28th CPSU congress between 2 and 13 July 1990, but Gorbachev and Shevardnadze prevailed. The latter argued that a divided Germany offered the USSR no cast-iron security guarantee because it was 'based on the artificial and unnatural division of a great nation'. Deployment of Soviet troops in the GDR to thwart unification would spell 'disaster', he warned.¹¹³ Gorbachev apparently supported him, asking: 'Do you want to have tanks again?' and 'Shall we teach them again how to live?'¹¹⁴ Falin later complained that all Soviet decisions about

German reunification were concentrated in the hands of the CPSU General Secretary and his foreign minister.¹¹⁵

Unlike the British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, Gorbachev showed great courage in conquering his own fears about German reunification. He grew up in the North Caucasian territory of Stavropol, occupied by the Nazis in 1942. His father served on the Ukrainian front and three of his uncles perished in the war. Some of his neighbours almost starved to death.¹¹⁶ Yet on 20 February 1990, Gorbachev stated that while some apprehension regarding German reunification was to be expected, 'one cannot deny that the German people have drawn lessons from the experience of Hitlerite domination and the Second World War. In both German states new generations have grown up to see Germany's role in the world in a different way'.¹¹⁷ In his congratulatory letter to FRG President Richard von Weizsäcker on 3 October 1990, the Soviet leader wrote that 'Unification would not have been possible without the radical democratic reforms' enacted in both their countries.¹¹⁸

Conclusion

Gorbachev showed that 'great men' can and sometimes do make history, even if, like the rest of humanity, they cannot escape the law of unintended consequences. By thawing the ice of the Cold War, he inadvertently triggered the geopolitical avalanche that buried the GDR. Never before had an empire melted away so quickly and so peacefully. If he had taken the advice of his CPSU critics, the East German revolution would have been drowned in blood and Europe pushed to the brink of military conflict. His refusal to deploy Red Army troops sealed the fate of the 'Workers' and Peasants' Power'. After his visit to Moscow on 10 February 1990, the West German Chancellor said that he had acquired 'the key to German unity'.¹¹⁹ It had been given to him by the Soviet leader. Nobody destabilised the GDR as much as Gorbachev did and nobody did more to bring about German reunification.

Notes

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- 3 A. Nelson, *Cold War Ecology: Forests, Farms, & People in the East German Landscape, 1945-1989* (New Haven, 2005), pp. 142, 179–80.

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- 5 Honecker was appointed First Secretary of the SED on 3 May 1971. He was renamed General Secretary at the party's 9th congress held between 18 and 22 May 1976. A few months later, on 29 October, he also became East Germany's Head of State, a position formally known as Chairman of the State Council.
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- 15 All quotations in this paragraph are cited from SAPMO-BA, DY 30/2383 (Honecker's Office): minutes of conversation between Honecker and Gorbachev, 3 October 1986.
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- 17 H. Weber, *DDR: Grundriß der Geschichte, 1945–1990* (Hannover, 1991), p. 197.
- 18 SAPMO-BA, DY 30/2384 (Honecker's Office): minutes of conversation between Honecker and Dobrynin, Berlin, 20 January 1987.
- 19 Nakath, 'SED und Perestroika', pp. 16–17.
- 20 SAPMO-BA, DY 30/vorl. 42343 (Hager's Office): memo from Hager to Honecker about his conversation with Georgy Shakhnazarov. The conversation took place during a break in the discussions of Communist Party Secretaries for International and Ideological work on 22–3 January 1987 in Warsaw.
- 21 SAPMO-BA, DY 30/J NL 26/11: advance transcript of *Stern* interview sent to SED Politburo members, 20 March 1987.

- 22 Interview of the author with Kurt Hager in Berlin, 1 December 1992.
- 23 SAPMO-BA, DY 30/J NL 26/11: advance transcript of *Stern* interview.
- 24 Nakath, 'SED und Perestroika', p. 17.
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- 40 A. J. McAdams, *Germany Divided: From the Wall to Reunification* (New Jersey, 1993), p. 180.
- 41 The Federal Commission for the Documents of the State Security Service of the former GDR (BStU), Central Archive (ZA), ZAIG 4217, p. 7.
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- 43 SAPMO-BA, DY 30/2386 (Honecker's Office): memorandum of

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Part III

The East European revolutions: internal and external perspectives

The demise of communism in Poland: a staged evolution or failed revolution?

Tom Junes

Even after so many years, the most striking fact about the demise of communism in Poland remains that it happened through a peaceful and negotiated process. Having seemingly unfolded quite suddenly, it was the result of several inter-playing factors over a longer period of time than the actual events of the spring and summer of 1989. Changes in the international geopolitical context, a disastrous economic situation, efforts towards reform from within by the regime's elite and persistent oppositional activity all contributed to set in place a scenario that resulted in a soft transition through semi-free elections to the appointment of a first non-communist government. Notwithstanding the historical weight these events carried, a supposed lack of ostentatious revolutionary characteristics has led to ambiguities in the historical assessment of 1989 in Poland. On the one hand there was an evolutionary process from above of political manoeuvring by the regime, while on the other hand a revolutionary process from below manifested in regular recurring crises and the rise of an organised opposition. Yet, neither the former nor latter process necessarily had to lead to regime change. This chapter will therefore reflect on the collapse of communism in Poland from a broader historical perspective. First, it will discuss the recurring crises before the 1980s. Second, it will focus on the period leading up to the events of 1989 and the factors that precipitated far-reaching change. Finally, it will elaborate on the perception of 1989 as a revolutionary event in Poland.

The recurring crises of Polish communism

The communist regime in Poland was the result of the outcome of the Second World War, the country's liberation by the Red Army and the 'Big Three' deal at Yalta ceding it to the Soviet sphere of influence. Even before the war was over Poles had resisted the prospect of Soviet

overlordship by attempting to liberate their capital through their own efforts in the summer of 1944.¹ On 3 May 1946 Polish students took to the streets on the pre-war Constitution Day holiday, which had been banned by the communist-led government of national unity.² Following rigged elections, a terror campaign and other methods of political manipulation, the communist take-over was complete. Subsequently, a Stalinist *Gleichschaltung* took place, atomising Polish society and subordinating it to the central control of the new Communist Party, the *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* (PZPR – Polish United Workers' Party). The zenith of the totalitarian Stalinist period lasted until the mid-1950s.³ In 1956 Poland saw worker rebellion, student protest and a resurgent Roman Catholic Church leading to the ousting of the Stalinist leadership and the ascendancy of the 'national reformist' Władysław Gomułka as party leader.⁴ The 1956 crisis had several causes. Changes in international politics emanating from Moscow in the wake of the Soviet Communist Party's 20th congress, economic malaise as the six-year-plan had failed to produce the expected results and generational revolt had all contributed to the culmination of the upheavals. Communist Poland had gone through its first major regime crisis and it set the precedent for a pattern that would emerge throughout the following decades – that of popular unrest resulting in leadership or policy changes in an attempt to placate the populace.⁵

The revolutionary impetus of destalinisation was soon curbed once Gomułka consolidated his power. The period – dubbed the 'small stabilisation' – was one in which the authorities collided with the resurgent Church which presented the population with an alternative, competing and in effect more accepted worldview.⁶ Moreover, towards the end of the 1960s the regime was rocked by a wave of discord, which was de facto generational. In March 1968, Poland saw the emergence of a nationwide student protest movement. Although, the protests shook the regime, it failed to destabilise it and resulted in a repressive counter-reaction against the intelligentsia at large while also leading to purges within party ranks. This crackdown was further exacerbated by the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia to halt the Prague Spring reform movement in August 1968. These events signalled an end to the illusion that the post-Stalinist system could be reformed from within. Simultaneously, the country's economy was showing signs of a downturn as it was beginning to feel the strain of the post-war demographic boom. When the deteriorating situation forced the Gomułka leadership to raise subsidised prices on basic foodstuffs in December 1970, worker protest broke out. The regime resorted to repression in an attempt to quell the strikes in the country's coastal region, but the situation escalated and resulted in the deaths of dozens of workers. The violent turn led to the downfall of Gomułka and his replacement by Edward Gierek as party leader.⁷

The new Gierek leadership subsequently managed to sooth the population with an economic policy designed to provide more consumer goods financed with loans from the West. Despite this overture to the capitalist world, the regime pulled in some ideological reins which galvanised the oppositional intelligentsia milieu.⁸ However, the effect of the 1970s oil shocks caused Gierek's economic strategy to gradually collapse from the middle of the decade. The regime once again attempted to introduce price hikes in June 1976, only to be deterred by new worker riots.⁹ In the wake of the 1976 crisis an organised opposition emerged among intellectuals, students, workers and farmers. Coincidentally, the government's efforts to repress this opposition outright were impeded by the endorsement of the Helsinki detente process whereby Poland's western moneylenders could use its formal commitment to respecting human rights as a lever for further loans.¹⁰ Furthermore, the regime's prestige was dealt a significant blow with the ascendancy of Karol Wojtyła, the archbishop of Kraków, to the papacy in 1978. The following year the new Pope visited his homeland and his mass sermons served to invigorate not only the opposition, but the population at large.¹¹

In the summer of 1980 the economic predicament struck once again. Forced by a foreign debt explosion, an array of price increases was implemented without prior announcement. Worker strikes engulfed the country leading eventually to negotiations which culminated in the workers being granted the right to form free trade unions. This unprecedented and revolutionary event in the history of the Soviet bloc constituted the birth of Solidarity (*Solidarność*) and led directly to the downfall of the Gierek leadership. However, *Solidarność* soon became more than just a trade union, evolving into a vast social movement encompassing a third of the Polish population – about ten million people. Following the workers' example, private farmers and students, backed by the Church, set up independent organisations of their own. With the economy further deteriorating, the regime seemed to lose its grip on power and the Soviet leadership exerted pressure on the then Polish leaders, Stanisław Kania and General Wojciech Jaruzelski, to eliminate the 'counter-revolution'. The crisis dragged on throughout 1981, radicalising *Solidarność*. Then, on the night of 12–13 December 1981, the Polish military led by Jaruzelski staged a coup, declared martial law and detained thousands of opposition activists thereby literally decapitating *Solidarność*.¹²

This relatively bloodless coup put the Polish military firmly in control and dealt the opposition a devastating blow, as all organisations were suspended and the remnants of the decimated *Solidarność* were forced underground. Simultaneously, the junta set out to reanimate the economy and reinstate the party's authority during a period of 'normalisation'. However, the economic malaise endured – the regime was targeted by

international sanctions – thereby perpetuating the political crisis when the party was reinstated. The population became demoralised and lost its will to fight. The *Solidarność* crisis had seen 16 months of relative freedom and dynamic social activity and constituted a revolutionary generational event. It had spawned a significant oppositional elite and, moreover, was the culmination of the recurring crises of the past decades. Although martial law put an abrupt end to *Solidarność*, it simultaneously signalled the regime's ultimate bankruptcy. The now entrenched crisis of the post-martial law normalisation offered little prospect for improvement in the near future as the regime failed to regain its lost terrain. Moreover, the international political situation of the early 1980s, with an assertive American presidential administration and an inert Soviet leadership, meant that the Polish communist regime was set to remain in place, continuing its life as a patient crippled by the effect of multiple seizures strapped to a life-support machine for as long as the Cold War endured. Nevertheless, martial law had demonstrated the ultimate limitation of revolutionary change from below. For as long as the regime controlled the means to repress revolt and was willing to use them, it would prevail.

The end of communism in Poland

In light of the Polish military's success in imposing martial law, the problem of how the communist regime met its end in a surprisingly swift and non-violent manner not even a decade after it had crushed the single largest opposition movement in the history of the communist bloc warrants careful examination. During the normalisation period the regime thoroughly reassessed the possible threat to the state, as is reflected in numerous security apparatus reports and other internal documents. Whereas the regime was deemed to have sufficient resources to repress the opposition, the problem of society's, and in particular the younger generation's, rejection of Marxism was regarded as a greater predicament and, above all, one that was difficult to tackle in light of the country's economic malaise. It was, moreover, considered impossible to return to the status quo before 1980. A special party commission tasked to evaluate the roots of the recurring crises had not provided an optimistic assessment.¹⁴ The regime thus found itself at an impasse.

A stalemate had been reached by the middle of the decade in which a stagnated normalisation dragged on with neither the regime nor opposition being able to shift the balance of power. Then, several developments took place that altered the political scene in Poland. First, there was a change in the Soviet leadership. The policies of the new General Secretary of the CPSU, Mikhail Gorbachev, significantly transformed the geopolitical framework in which the Polish communist regime had been locked.

Gorbachev's 'new thinking' changed attitudes towards reform within both the regime and opposition groups, as the previous Soviet 'thresholds of tolerance' vis-à-vis its satellites gradually eroded.¹⁵ Second, the Polish authorities proclaimed a general amnesty regarding the martial law period and released the remaining political prisoners, thus signaling a certain relaxation of repression. Finally, the mid-1980s saw a new generation of youth come of age that had not been directly affected by the imposition of martial law and the defeat of *Solidarność*. This generation was prone to rebel and imbued with a resolute anti-communist spirit. The influence of these three factors changed the situation to such a degree that it was no longer possible for the post-martial law stalemate to be upheld, resulting in the demise of communism in Poland before the end of the decade.

In the Soviet Union Gorbachev implemented reformist economic and political policies known as *perestroika* (reconstruction) and *glasnost* (openness) and implicitly encouraged the Eastern European satellite regimes to undertake similar reforms. Simultaneously, a change in Soviet foreign policy took place effectively disengaging the USSR from its military and economic commitments abroad. Gorbachev's foreign diplomacy and the fact that the subsequent Reagan and Bush administrations were willing to cooperate with him ended the Cold War. Gorbachev's stance vis-à-vis the socialist states of Eastern Europe implied that the Soviet Union was no longer willing to bolster the satellite regimes with its military power.¹⁶ If the possibility of Soviet military intervention had been a factor motivating the imposition of martial law in December 1981, such a threat had faded towards the end of the decade.

As stated above, the Polish regime was aware of the impasse it found itself in during the normalisation period. It served – as during past crises – to incite different factions within the party apparatus and in particular among its top echelons. The events of the early 1980s, moreover, polarised the mutual differences between the hardliners – the so-called 'concrete' – and the would-be reformers. While the former were proponents of an orthodox political line and professed a dogmatic loyalty towards Moscow, the latter were mainly represented by a younger generation of party activists many of whom had begun their careers in the late 1960s and 1970s. As the reigns of power were steadily held by a centrist faction represented by General Jaruzelski, the previous balance between the hardliners and reformers proved decisive in determining the course the centrists would steer. While the party leadership tried to maintain the widest possible united front during the 1980–81 crisis, the ensuing years saw a phenomenon of 'clipping the wings' in which both hardliners and reformers were ousted. Nevertheless, these personnel changes at the top simultaneously allowed for a new generation of party activists – who were less ideologically orthodox – to come to the fore and

assume influential positions in the party apparatus. Members of this 'generation of 84' like Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Leszek Miller – both later prominent politicians of the post-communist left – were no true believers in the communist cause, but talented pragmatists. Many of them had undertaken economic studies, visited the West and had a realistic assessment of the problems of the era through their connections in the regime's highest echelons of power.¹⁷ This generational change in party ranks stood in stark contrast to other Soviet bloc countries, such as the GDR and Czechoslovakia where the respective party apparatus was prone to sustain gerontocracies of out-of-touch leaders. These personnel changes in the Polish communist establishment would become an important factor facilitating political change at the end of the decade.

In the meantime, the overall situation of the country did not take a turn for the better. Crippled by a failing economy and battered by international sanctions, its ruling elite sought a way out of the enduring crisis. A thorough-going set of reforms was needed to revive the economy if the regime were to have any chance of recovery.¹⁸ In 1987, a referendum concerning economic reform was held, but it was rejected. Moreover, the continuing economic malaise led to a series of worker and student strikes during the spring and summer of 1988. These strikes showed that a new generation of activists had come to the fore imbued, on the one hand, with the myth of *Solidarność* and on the other unaffected by the demoralisation of martial law. The strikes resembled those of 1980 only in the fact that the workers called for the re-legalisation of *Solidarność*, which had been banned in the aftermath of martial law. Yet, the bulk of the strikers were not old enough to have experienced the *Solidarność* period first hand. In their struggle and resentment, these younger workers were supported by oppositional activists from the same age group who had become politically active in a variety of social movements since the declaration of martial law.¹⁹ Moreover, the stance of this younger generation stood in contrast to the overall societal mood as the 1980s had sunk Polish society in general into a weary stance towards political action. Martial law had broken the backbone of the social movement that had been *Solidarność*. The post-martial law status quo was presumed to hold, since the regime – despite being unable to reanimate society's belief in the political system – had shown that it had enough resolve and means to retain its grip on power. The period of post-martial law normalisation therefore presented gloomy perspectives, but this perception of hopelessness paradoxically invigorated the generation of youth that came of age in this period to take a stand against the regime.²⁰

In the immediate aftermath of martial law, when the majority of *Solidarność* leaders had been apprehended, the oppositional activists who had managed to stay at large concentrated on underground activity.

However, the limitations of underground work incited the more radical activists – among whom were many youths – to take a more confrontational attitude to the authorities. Inspired by the Polish resistance of the Second World War, a group of radical activists set up *Solidarność Walcząca* (Fighting Solidarity) which engaged the regime in patriotic demonstrations and pitched street battles. Although this was a minority, the impetus towards public oppositional action increased in the middle of the decade as a direct result of the regime's loosening of repression. First, there were the post-martial law amnesties, the last of which took place in 1986. They were a sign of shifting priorities. The government's main concern was the economic situation and releasing political prisoners helped to improve its image in the West. Reviving the economy was perceived as being more effective than outright political repression. Moreover, the regime believed that the opposition had ceased to be a major threat and thus saw a certain liberalisation as a means of gaining popular support.²¹

To be sure, the opposition's activity had been significantly weakened as consecutive leading underground activists had been apprehended in the years following martial law, while the overall weariness of the political struggle led others to suspend their underground activity. In addition, the amnesties posed a problem for those opposition activists who were released as they could not just reconnect with the remaining underground for risk of further exposure. However, this loosening of repression encouraged open, aboveground activity, although the surviving underground activists were too cautious to expose themselves. Therefore, these circumstances heartened the younger generation towards oppositional activity in the public sphere. In short, the youth took to the streets. The *zadyma* ('blizzard') – denoting the clashes between groups of politicised youth and the security forces – became a near cult-like term symbolising the actions of this generation. The lower risk of repression experienced by these young people must be qualified, however, as in reality the number of arrests and beatings did not necessarily decrease, but the situation was significantly less severe than in the first years of martial law since an arrest rarely led to prosecution thereby instilling a spirit of heroic daring among the *zadymiarzy* ('blizzarders').²²

Another influential factor on this generation's activity came from the sphere of counter-culture, in particular punk with its anarchist tendencies. In the early 1980s, anarchism as an expression of rebellion against the martial law authorities and the passivity of the older generation proved fertile ground among some groups of youth, who founded *Ruch Społeczeństwa Alternatywnego* (RSA – Movement for an Alternative Society) in 1983. While engaging in certain underground activities such as publishing, this movement came to the fore in 1985 when it organised a *zadyma* during the 1 May parade in Gdańsk – the cradle of *Solidarność*

– simultaneously defying a non-violent oppositional demonstration led by Lech Wałęsa himself. While the RSA's programme propagated a utopian anarchist ideal of a peaceful stateless society, its actions were focused on concrete issues such as opposing military service – a thorny issue in light of the military's predominance after martial law.²³

Indeed, the issue of the military became the focal point of another movement, *Ruch Wolność i Pokój* (WiP – Freedom and Peace Movement), that emerged during the normalisation years. The origins of WiP lay in a campaign led by former oppositional student activists from the 1980–81 period against a perceived increase in state repression towards conscientious objectors in 1984. This pacifist campaign not only stood in contrast to *Solidarność's* inertia during the normalisation years, but touched a hitherto taboo subject – the army was perceived even by the then opposition as a sacred and patriotic Polish institution. Despite this predicament, WiP claimed a leading position in the anti-communist opposition in the mid-1980s as its programme and actions represented a fresh approach. The movement's platform was concerned with human rights issues in which the struggle for freedom of speech and religion as well as national self-determination and independence were fundamental. Furthermore, the movement's pacifist agenda was based on opposing the Cold War arms race and advocating the demilitarisation of Central Europe. Inspired by humanist philosophy and Christian ethics, environmental protection and the struggle against hunger were of special concern since these were perceived as essential aims guaranteeing the right to a dignified existence.

In practice, WiP introduced a form of activism that stood in contrast to the hitherto conspiratorial tactics and confrontational street protests of the opposition. Although it had many things in common in the way it staged protests and the fact that it engaged in publishing, the main difference was that WiP operated openly and indeed drew as much publicity to its actions as it could. This enabled the relatively small group of activists to gain widespread media coverage. Moreover, WiP was not only pluralist in outlook, but also in its actions. Whereas the initial campaigns concerned conscientious objectors, the movement subsequently joined the international peace movement, demanded the abolition of nuclear weapons and campaigned against the Soviet war in Afghanistan. In its contacts with western peace groups, WiP activists exposed the communist lies and propaganda to which the former were often sympathetic. The movement also tackled environmental issues, in particular, following the catastrophe at the Chernobyl nuclear plant in 1986. WiP's activity focused on concrete issues in a more pragmatic way than the RSA as its activists – who subscribed to a variety of political views ranging from anarchism to nationalism – were united primarily by their anti-communism. The underlying logic

was not to uphold a specific ideology or political programme, but to target the regime where it was vulnerable. This proved a successful strategy as it revitalised oppositional activity in the 1980s.²⁴

Hence, the generation of youthful opposition activists that came of age in the mid-1980s presented a spectrum of political tendencies ranging from nationalist and Catholic worldviews to pacifist and ecological concerns to anarchist rebellion. But against the backdrop of this differentiated ideological and political consciousness stood the united actions of this generation. These were inspired by the traditions of the wartime and *Solidarność* underground and the dynamics of the *zadyma*. The latter included not only the classic violent street battle between riot police and radical youth, but also the less confrontational, more frivolous and carnivalesque approach of organising so-called 'happenings'. This latter style of street-theatrical demonstrations was pioneered by another movement that came to the fore in the late 1980s, the *Pomarańczowa Alternatywa* (Orange Alternative). The first of these 'happenings' was organised in 1985, although the concept really took off from 1987. They centred on mocking the absurdities of existing official holidays and commemorations and proved to be a very potent critique of societal problems. A common characteristic of these 'happenings' was that they were peaceful and full of satirical behaviour, in effect disarming the repressive power of the regime and inciting people to cross the barrier of fear and take to the streets. *Pomarańczowa Alternatywa* was about having fun in public in numbers, while the regime was forced to choose between either turning a blind eye towards non-violent 'happenings' or sending the police in to disperse them. Moreover, the 'happenings' exposed the authorities in a way that made it hard to take them seriously anymore. During the events and in the content of the flyers that accompanied them, the language and symbolism of *Pomarańczowa Alternatywa* mimicked that of the government albeit with a more than healthy dose of irony and satire. All the absurdities of the 'happenings' aside, this type of action was assessed by the regime as a new form of political struggle that was particularly attractive to the younger generation.²⁵ It was right. The prospects of unleashing youthful energy during a *zadyma* or 'mocking the commies' during a happening had an effective mobilising potential among Poland's youth.

The activity of these movements, especially their revamping of the opposition against the regime, also rubbed off on the generation of students that was entering the universities and colleges in the latter half of the 1980s. Many of these student radicals had engaged themselves at high school in oppositional movements such as the *Federacja Młodzieży Walczącej* (Federation of Fighting Youth). But once they arrived on campus in the institutions of higher education around the country their non-conformist, rebellious stance drew them to reactivate the practically

defunct independent student organisation, *Niezależne Zrzeszenie Studentów* (NZS – Independent Students' Association) from the 1980–81 period, which subsequently came to embody a symbolic connection with the mythical episode of societal mobilisation against the regime. While the organisation was resurrected underground, it 'resurfaced' in early 1988 on the twentieth anniversary of the March 1968 student revolt. When the labour strikes broke out in the spring and summer of that year, it was the students who showed the most vigorous support by aiding the workers with their organisational skills or by staging solidarity actions in the more prominent academic urban centres.²⁶ It was this generational solidarity that fuelled the drive for the re-legalisation of *Solidarność*, as the NZS was tightly linked to the former in 1980–81.

These young activists and the social movements they engaged in thus managed to resurrect *Solidarność*; they broke the barrier of fear that martial law had instilled in Polish society and their activity permitted the opposition to reemerge. However, these post-martial law movements differed from their earlier counterparts as they did not base themselves on a comprehensive programme, but rather an amalgam of concrete issues. The veteran opposition activists who had constituted the *Solidarność* elite in 1980–81 had also undergone an evolution in the same period. Many of them had moved towards ideas of market reform and western-style democracy. The young strikers in 1988 who were incited by poor economic prospects therefore opposed not only the regime's plans for reform, but also the stance of the former *Solidarność* elite. Nevertheless, despite the radicalism of these younger activists, the regime was not willing to respond with a general crackdown even though it possessed the capacity to do so and instead turned to the former trade union leadership, and in particular to Wałęsa, to put an end to the strikes. The latter complied in return for the regime's promise to initiate a dialogue on the future of the country. Whereas the strike movement of 1988 may have weakened the morale and resolve of the regime, the opposition was in no state to topple it directly. Talks were therefore an option that both sides seemingly warmly embraced.

Thus in late 1988, against the backdrop of a changed international context and with the regime facing a reinvigorated opposition while not being willing to resort to a violent solution, talks between government representatives and the opposition cautiously took place to seek a way out of the stalemated economic and political crisis.²⁷ Initially, the authorities stalled and aimed to outmanoeuvre the opposition. This strategy, however, backfired when the regime agreed to a live television debate in November 1988 between Wałęsa and Alfred Miodowicz, the boss of the official trade union, during which the former surprisingly outperformed the latter. It was a humiliation that forced the regime to take the opposition seriously and after a few weeks of preparatory discussions, the official negotiations

– which would become known as the Round Table talks – between regime and opposition delegations commenced in February 1989.

After two months of negotiations, the Round Table talks came to a close in early April with both parties having reached agreement on most of the issues. The most important outcome was the re-legalisation of *Solidarność* and the staging of semi-free elections in which a proportion of the seats in parliament were reserved for the regime. The elections were supposed to take place within two months of the conclusion of the talks and the date was set for 4 June 1989. Although there had been some popular resistance to the negotiation process, mainly from the radical younger generation that had not seen its demands met, Polish society mobilised for the elections, which turned into an unexpected landslide victory for *Solidarność*. It won all but one of the freely contested seats. The poll results constituted a severe blow to the regime, but it honoured them. The authorities had originally sought to use the elections to form a government of national unity under their control, but the election outcome had made this plan unworkable. When the communists' satellite parties changed sides and entered coalition talks with *Solidarność*, the communist hold on power was broken. Unwilling to reverse the process by resorting to violence and unimpeded by Moscow, the regime permitted an opposition-led government to take office. In order to reassure the Kremlin, a power-sharing compromise between the communists and the opposition was worked out. The latter would provide the prime minister and the former would provide the president. Under the presidency of General Jaruzelski, a new government led by *Solidarność* prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, assumed its responsibilities in August 1989. Although it may not have seemed so at the time, for all intents and purposes communism in Poland was over. Without doubt Poland had set the example for its neighbours for within months the communist regimes in Eastern Europe fell one after another.²⁸ Just over a year later, Jaruzelski ceded power to his successor, Wałęsa, who had won the first popular presidential election in December 1990. The fall of communism in Poland had come about in stages and without any big bang, certainly in comparison to the revolts the country had seen during the previous decades.

Revolution or evolution?

The keyword denoting the demise of communism in Poland and the rest of Central and Eastern Europe is 'revolution'.²⁹ However, as depicted above, the events of 1989 differed from what is popularly assumed to constitute a revolution and their causes have been the subject of heated debate among historians and social scientists alike, resulting in different narratives. Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on some key questions regarding

Polish developments. The first concerns the structural circumstances which formed the backdrop to political developments. Here it is important to underline the failing economy and the change in the international situation. However, neither factor alone can be seen as having brought about the outcomes of 1989. The economic crisis was not as severe as it had been at the beginning of the decade and Gorbachev's foreign policy encouraged reform rather than regime change.³⁰ Of course, a prospering economy would have limited the breeding ground for opposition and pressure from hardliners in Moscow might have diminished any prospect for dialogue with the opposition. Although these factors were important and conducive they were not decisive in bringing about the demise of communism in Poland. Economic crisis was not new and the Soviet bloc had seen reformers come and go.

The second question then concerns agency. If the circumstances for regime change were there, then who made the 'revolution' – the opposition or the official elite seeking a way out of the crisis? Was it a process directed from above or forced from below? The conventional narrative states that the birth of *Solidarność* signalled the end of communism. Yet, *Solidarność* as it emerged in 1980 was crushed in 1981 and did not reappear in the same form – it was re-legalised as a result of the Round Table talks, that is only after the regime had initiated a dialogue with the opposition. The main grassroots opposition in the late 1980s had been carried by a generation of activists who in general had no direct recollection of *Solidarność* or had not played a major role during the 1980–81 crisis.³¹ *Solidarność* as an organisation may have been a relic of the past, but *Solidarność* as a myth – the memory of the mass social movement that had rocked the regime – was surely more potent than ever at the end of the decade.³² It was this myth that inspired the younger generation of activists to strike out against the authorities; while the social movement had spawned an older oppositional elite to whom the party leadership was able to turn to initiate dialogue. The opposition, which in 1989 flew the *Solidarność* banner, was thus not the same as it had been a decade earlier. Its legacy, though, had produced a more radical grassroots alternative, a well-organised structure that had withstood the normalisation period and the growing passivity of the *Solidarność* elite. Nevertheless, the opposition as such was a weaker force than it had been at the beginning of the decade and was not capable of overthrowing the regime.

The regime, and in particular the party leadership, had undergone an evolution since the imposition of martial law. It had come to understand that the party's authority could not be reinstated. Moreover, some of the more blatant hardliners had been removed from its ranks and the Jaruzelski faction, de facto representing a centrist line within the apparatus, held on tight to the reigns of power. Then a general amnesty was proclaimed and

things began to change. The former *Solidarność* elite, consisting of its leading intellectuals and prominent seasoned worker activists, came back to the oppositional fore albeit without the ten-million-strong grassroots backing they had in 1980–81. Meanwhile, the years of normalisation had moved the positions of reform-minded party activists and part of the *Solidarność* elite closer together. The regime, furthermore, was not bound by the strict ideological supervision of Moscow, where Gorbachev was pushing through his own reformist programme, and embarked on a policy of cooption vis-à-vis the opposition. It relaxed press censorship and made overtures towards non-party intellectuals and opposition activists to engage in a cooperative effort to tackle the crisis.³³ The opposition elite had been out-of-touch with the strike movements of 1988, which had been carried out by a younger generation that was more radical. The regime sought to capitalise on this and despite the strikes dying out, it initiated talks with the old *Solidarność* elite.

For opportunistic reasons, both the reform-minded and centrist factions of the party leadership now sought to strike a deal with the *Solidarność* elite which seemed alienated from the grassroots opposition movement. Nevertheless, from these talks the Round Table was initiated. The party leadership, consisting mainly of the same figures who had imposed martial law at the beginning of the decade, now moved to cooperate with the oppositional elite – the same people it had incarcerated and interned years earlier – to get the country out of the quagmire of economic and political stagnation in the wake of the failed referendum.³⁴ The *Solidarność* elite agreed to this as it advocated economic reform and embraced the principles of a market economy, in contrast to its previous trade unionist stance, in return for a measure of power sharing.³⁵ In fact, neither of the two sides at the table were sure what the outcome would be for each had its own aims and objectives. Both were over-confident and distrustful of the other. The process was an evolutionary one in which both sides matured towards a dialogue. Yet, it took place in stages influenced by pressures both from within the party apparatus as well as the grassroots opposition. In a sense the reform-minded party leadership and the former *Solidarność* elite were drawn towards each other.³⁶ The reformers and the centrists were encouraged by the hardliners' opposition to any dealings with the opposition, while the oppositional elite was harried on by a radicalising younger generation of workers and students. At least part of this younger generation opposed the talks or the prospect of striking a deal with the communists. The Round Table process was therefore an accord between elites and it was the result of an evolution on both sides.

In light of this elite-engineered transition, the question arises whether the process can be seen as revolutionary. Such an assessment is clouded by certain characteristics of the events that seem to contradict the revolutionary

nature of the transition.³⁷ Moreover, the events of 1989 differ significantly from the Polish insurrectory myth that includes not only the crises under communism, but the national uprisings and wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Round Table talks hardly constituted a narrative of heroism and self-sacrifice for the greater cause. Moreover, the apparent ease with which the regime imploded and gave way to a democratic system seemed to repudiate the historical weight of the events and their consequences. The events of 1989 paradoxically took place in a relatively non-violent climate which stood in contrast to earlier crises that have become the subject of a certain historical mythology. The process that led to the demise of communism was negotiated and the regime was in fact not overthrown. It simply imploded while being outmanoeuvred by the opposition in the wake of the elections.

Furthermore, the events of 1989 did not entail a clear break with the past. In fact, some posts in the Mazowiecki government were still held by communist functionaries, most notably the ministry of internal affairs. Moreover, General Jaruzelski remained president when the state was officially reformed from a 'People's Republic' to the Third Polish Republic, and managed to stay in office even after the communists had been ousted from power in neighbouring countries. Above all, the Mazowiecki government moved ahead with the implementation of economic reforms and did not raise the issue of dealing with the past in a robust way, which would later lead to a perception that the communists were 'let off easy'. The PZPR dissolved itself at its last congress in January 1990, only to reconvene the next day and recreate itself as a social democratic party. These 'post-communists' returned to power by the mid-1990s having won both the parliamentary and presidential elections in 1993 and 1995 respectively.³⁸ The immediate legacy of the transition encouraged a negative perception of the events of 1989 among the population. Unemployment incited resentment towards the former opposition, while political instability, splits within the opposition camp and eventually the return to power of the former communists – many of whom had actually fared quite well during the transition in what was ascribed by critics to secret deals supposedly made at the Round Table – were perceived as a 'failure' of the revolution.

However, the fact that negotiations were part of the process in Poland, and likewise in other former communist states, can be interpreted as being revolutionary. For the communist regime had hitherto never *bona fide* recognised an independent partner in society, and hence the Round Table talks broke the pattern of previous crises, in which other political players had eventually been repressed or neutralised.³⁹ Moreover, analysing the events with the benefit of hindsight blurs the fact that the changes and stages in the evolution that led to the demise of communism had been far from predictable. The reality was that even on the eve of the elections

on 4 June 1989, neither the regime nor the opposition was able to foresee the outcome. Then, when it appeared that the opposition had won a landslide victory the regime respected the results, while on that same day the Chinese communists cracked down violently on the Tiananmen Square demonstrators.⁴⁰ Again, it must be stressed that the course of the events took an unexpected turn, but the acknowledgement and subsequent respect by the regime of political pluralism was revolutionary as it signalled the end of one-party rule. Thus, the elections of 4 June rightfully mark the demise of communism in Poland and although they may not have been revolutionary in form, their impact and consequences definitely were.

Conclusion

In assessing the events of 1989 and the collapse of communism in Poland, it is important to take into account that the regime and opposition differed in their aims at the outset of the Round Table. A subsequent series of unexpected turns of events influenced the outcome of the process, which in the end surprised both sides and signalled the end of communism in Poland. On the one hand the process 'from above' – the negotiations between the party leadership and the former *Solidarność* elite – resembled a staged evolution ultimately leading to the downfall of the communist regimes throughout the region. On the other hand, the process 'from below' symbolised a defeat and a failed revolution for the younger generation of oppositional activists as it did not overthrow the regime through its actions.

However, the events of 1989 were the result of a longer process, one of recurring crises during the communist period, in which the regime was confronted with resistance and opposition from the population. These crises resulted in gradual social and political change that would ultimately lead to the situation of the 1980s when both regime and opposition elites had drawn lessons from earlier experiences and reacted differently to the new crisis against the backdrop of a changed international political context. The truly revolutionary character of the transition lay in the fact that it happened through a mutual consensus in which the regime recognised the opposition as a legitimate political force – a first in the communist bloc – and then subsequently relinquished power without a fight, while its heirs adapted to the new reality and rules of a democratic system. Therefore, one can depict the demise of communism in Poland from the perspective of the longer *durée* as an evolution through stages of revolutionary moments. Its assessment as a success or failure is to a certain extent more relevant to contemporary political discourse in Poland, as politicians and political parties try to exploit the hardships of the transition to a liberal democracy and market economy experienced by a portion of the population or use

the communist past to discredit political opponents. This issue is also addressed by Artur Lipiński in his contribution to the volume. But the fact that the country in which such debates can now take place is a member state of NATO and the EU, is more prosperous than it has ever been and enjoys a higher standard of living and a greater degree of freedom than ever before in history is hardly indicative of failure. Above all, the Polish transition from communism set in motion the chain of events of the *annus mirabilis* that was 1989.

Notes

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- 3 See A. Kemp-Welch (ed.), *Stalinism in Poland, 1944–1956* (Basingstoke, 1999).
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- 5 G. Ekiert and J. Kubik, *Rebellious Civil Society: Popular Protest and Democratic Consolidation in Poland, 1989–1993* (Ann Arbor, 2004), p. 24.
- 6 A. Dudek and R. Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce (1945–1989)* (Kraków, 2006), pp. 234–50.
- 7 See J. Eisler, *Polski Rok 1968* (Warsaw, 2006); J. Eisler, *Grudzień 1970: Geneza, Przebieg, Konsekwencje* (Warsaw, 2000).
- 8 A. Friszke, *Opozycja Polityczna w PRL 1945–1980* (London, 1994), pp. 324–32.
- 9 See P. Sasanka, *Czerwiec 1976: Geneza, Przebieg, Konsekwencje* (Warsaw, 2006).
- 10 Friszke, *Opozycja Polityczna w PRL*, pp. 338–578.
- 11 Dudek and Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce*, pp. 340–7.
- 12 See T. Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (New York, 1985); J. de Weydenthal, B. Porter and K. Devlin, *The Polish Drama: 1980–1982* (Lexington, 1983); R. Laba, *The Roots of Solidarity: A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization* (Princeton, 1991).
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- 16 See A. Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford, 1996).

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- 20 M. Castle, 'The Final Crisis of the People's Republic of Poland', in J. Leftwich Curry and L. Fajfer (eds), *Poland's Permanent Revolution: People vs. Elites, 1956–1990* (Washington, DC, 1996), pp. 222–7.
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- 22 Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*, pp. 23–30.
- 23 A. Dudek and T. Marszałkowski, *Walki Uliczne w PRL 1956–1989* (Kraków, 1999), pp. 365–9.
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The international context of Hungarian transition, 1989: the view from Budapest*

László Borhi

This chapter will examine the attitude of the USSR as well as the western powers to the transformation of Eastern Europe in the crucial year of 1989. It is primarily based on recently released Hungarian archival documents. These reveal what Soviet and western politicians told Hungarians about their attitude towards transition. The space allotted to each country's view will reflect the availability of evidence and not just its political weight. It will be argued that there was a meeting of minds between Moscow and the West that the foundations of the Yalta structures should survive, albeit on a cooperative basis. As NATO's Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs Henning Wegener put it in November 1989, the 'Warsaw Pact ... could well perform useful functions and enhance stability' if reformed on the basis of strict equality.¹ From early 1989 Hungarian officials pushed for a radical transformation of the Warsaw Pact's decision-making process. But opposition parties began to question the country's membership of the organisation early on in the year and top-level Hungarian officials broached the issue of neutrality in September. Quitting the pact enjoyed tremendous support because it would symbolise the regaining of lost sovereignty, but it also carried certain risks, especially in view of the experience of 1956.

Hungary as a pace-setter for change in Eastern Europe

By the second half of the 1970s János Kádár's Hungary was hailed as the most liberalised regime behind the Iron Curtain. Hungarian economic reforms seemed to justify the notion that Soviet-style socialism and the western system of capitalism would one day converge. Kádár's image had changed from the 'butcher of Budapest' to a statesman of European repute.

The doyen of US diplomacy, Averell Harriman asked for his mediation between Brezhnev and Carter in 1978,² and German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt stated that Kádár by virtue of his personal and international prestige could play a key role in improving East-West relations.³

In spite of its initial success, the much-vaunted economic reform of 1968 soon ran into trouble and by 1982 Hungary was on the brink of bankruptcy. The economy was dependent on western loans and trade for survival. Therefore, in spite of Soviet instructions to the contrary western contacts were intensified, particularly with West Germany and the USA. Although saved by financial manipulations, the payment crisis brought about by the failure of export-led growth and cheap credits refused to go away and in 1989 Hungary's foreign debt was among the highest in Europe. Because of this debt trap the Hungarian communist regime began to unravel. Measures of economic austerity were introduced in the early 1980s causing the regime to default on its commitment to keep the standard of living high in return for the populace accepting the political status quo. State security controls were lowered when the Hungarian-born American financier, George Soros, who actively fought for an open society, was allowed to establish a cultural foundation in Budapest in 1983. This was done despite Soros's subversive intent because of the funds he brought with him. In an effort to improve economic performance private enterprise was gradually reintroduced, and trade and joint ventures with the capitalist world became a priority. In 1988 Reagan's special envoy to Eastern Europe was pushing the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSzMP) to purchase American-made commodities of high value in return for economic help, and a year later the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the USA were competing for the Hungarian market. One of the world's largest companies, General Electric, returned to Hungary with an investment of 150 million US dollars. Even though it was evident in Moscow that the regime in Budapest was rapidly unravelling, the Soviet leadership refused to salvage it with loans. In 1985 independent candidates were allowed to participate in the national elections and although these were rigged by the security apparatus it was clear that the party's stranglehold on politics was weakening. As the system imploded the democratic opposition organised itself from 1987 and by 1988 opposition political parties were formed.

With Kádár's resignation in May 1988, the party reformers gained the upper hand and were willing to agree to deep-seated political and economic transformation to preserve the regime. Yet few predicted in January 1989 that by the end of the year Hungarians would be at the forefront of the dismantling of the Iron Curtain. As the year began reformers within the ruling party and the democratic opposition were split as to how far it was desirable or even possible to go towards full democratisation and the restoration of national sovereignty. Although the Soviet leadership had

seemingly reconciled itself to democratisation, renounced the Brezhnev doctrine and agreed to partial troop withdrawal, Gorbachev was unready for the unification of the continent or to renounce Moscow's military and economic control of Hungary and was wary of the infiltration of western influence. But during the course of 1989 events were spiraling out of control. Due to popular pressure the Hungarian party leadership was pushing for the withdrawal of Soviet troops and in September 1989 even the question of neutrality was broached. Budapest proposed the fundamental transformation of Comecon and the establishment of bilateral relations with the Common Market with eventual Hungarian membership in sight. The party rescinded its monopoly of power and agreed to free elections without any proviso, such as the deal struck in Poland, for the communist party's continued representation in government. By the autumn of 1989 Hungary was clearly in the vanguard of change that promised to propel onto the international agenda the very question of the division of Europe and the survival of the Soviet sphere of influence as established in the wake of the Second World War.

Hence, Hungary took centre stage in the transformation taking place behind the Iron Curtain. Grassroots initiatives were even more crucial than high politics. Hungary suspended the implementation of a Hungarian–Czechoslovak agreement to construct a dam on the Danube following intense pressure from an environmental group mustering huge popular support. The event that would have a pivotal impact on world politics was also a grassroots initiative: the organisation of a pan-European picnic at Sopron near the Austrian border. Here, exploiting the fact that the barbed wire protecting the Hungarian frontier had been dismantled, hundreds of East Germans raced through the border into freedom, thus sending the message that the Iron Curtain no longer existed in Hungary. When on 10–11 September 1989 Budapest rescinded an agreement with the GDR requiring it to close its borders to East German citizens wishing to cross into Austria, the very survival of the communist German state was called into question. This move was not intended to secure economic favours (which Budapest counted on and received), but as a demonstration of Hungary's commitment to change. The political weight of the refugee question was illustrated by the fact that in early August Bonn told the Hungarians that 'a massive flight of people from the GDR to the FRG was not in their [West Germans'] interest.'⁴ The Hungarian decision to permit East German refugees in Hungary to flee to Austria, followed by a similar move by Czechoslovakia, pulled the rug from under the Honecker regime and thereby thrust the German question onto the European agenda.⁵

Indeed, the West in general faced a dilemma. Fundamental political and economic changes were required in Hungary to avoid massive unrest. But if changes spiralled out of control the country could be thrown into

disarray with unforeseeable consequences for regional stability. Thus the West supported transformation along a tightrope: going far enough to satisfy the domestic appetite for democracy and to stave off economic collapse, but stopping short of upsetting the status quo and thus peace and equilibrium in Europe. In July 1989 the deputy head of the MSzMP Central Committee's foreign relations department, Imre Szokai, summarised the Hungarian perception of western attitudes:

it is the firm view of our western European partners that to preserve European stability and the historically evolved status quo there should be no regime change in Hungary [and] Hungarian politics should not impinge upon the USSR's security, military and political interests (they consider even mention of exit from the Warsaw Pact a dangerous fiction) ... The activities of (US) ambassador Mark Palmer and his associates are in stark contrast to this.⁶

But Palmer's activity did not necessarily reflect the views of his government. He later admitted to having had 'differences of opinion with some members of the Bush administration about how aggressively an ambassador could support the opposition'.⁷ Although Washington's grand strategy was 'to end the Cold War and the division of Europe through the peaceful, democratic transformation of the eastern half', in its practical implementation US policy was cautious and not all that different from the European approach. Reforms outpaced even the boldest objectives.⁸ For example, the Bush administration envisaged a transition period of a few years to full democracy. This stance would soon be outstripped by events.

Soviet responses

Soviet moves were hard to predict. Although Gorbachev had repeatedly suggested that the Brezhnev doctrine would not apply, these statements were not sufficiently unambiguous to be entirely relied upon.⁹ Moreover, some elements in the Soviet elite were known to deplore the 'loss' of eastern Europe.¹⁰ The threat of Soviet intervention influenced American thinking.¹¹ Although successful Hungarian reforms might help *perestroika*, the loss of Eastern Europe could lead to Gorbachev's removal, which in turn could end reform and Moscow's reconciliation with the West. The retraction of Soviet power, which safeguarded regional stability, could also have adverse consequences like the reappearance of regional conflict or even the resurgence of German hegemony. Rapid changes in the East could hinder the western integration process. Ultimately the preservation of stability prevailed in western thinking.

As Moscow's rule over Budapest mellowed, Soviet and Hungarian visions for the future diverged and Budapest pushed for fundamental change in

bilateral relations. The time seemed ripe for such a transformation. In the summer of 1988 Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze admitted defeat in the Cold War: 'The West beat us in all important fields, we are unable to bear the burden of the continual arms race ... Halting the arms race has absolute priority, we must use every occasion to reach agreements.'¹²

Gorbachev hoped that Budapest would 'solve its problems by better utilising the possibilities of socialism'¹³ and still wanted to 'demonstrate the superiority of socialism'.¹⁴ The Soviets failed to realise that the *ancien régime* could be discarded altogether. In July 1989, when the multi-party system had already been recognised, Anatoly Dobrynin, head of the CPSU's International Department, confided that the Soviet leadership had not even considered the possibility of a coalition government in Hungary.¹⁵ Was Eastern Europe still an asset? CPSU analysts thought that trade with Eastern Europe 'greatly favoured' the Soviet Union.¹⁶ Moreover, Hungary suffered from a large and growing Soviet trade deficit in transferable roubles. Converting the system to US dollars, as proposed by some Hungarian experts, could produce a crippling Hungarian deficit of 1.2 billion dollars within a year. Hungary depended on Soviet energy but the Soviet Union was no longer able to pay for its imports from Hungary and as a result Hungary had a trade surplus of a billion dollars which it could not afford.

'From the outset [the socialist states] formed a security zone, which provided strategic defence for the centre of socialism. Today ... the role of Eastern Europe remains essentially the same', CPSU analysts argued in early 1989.¹⁷ The previous year Gorbachev had announced unilateral troop reductions in East Central Europe and the western military districts of the USSR. This coincided with Hungary's budget-dictated decision in March 1989 to reduce its own forces and with a party resolution on 16 May to push for Soviet troop withdrawal. But Gorbachev protested that the proposed reduction was hasty and should be a function of the Vienna arms talks. The same applied to Soviet troop reductions. In Vienna, Hungary pushed for both cuts in the Hungarian forces and Soviet withdrawal. Although it seemed that the Soviet military 'no longer regarded the stationing of troops in adjacent states a prerequisite of security', Moscow's position shifted slowly.¹⁸ In March Gorbachev rejected the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, which he sought to retain on a democratised basis.¹⁹ Soviet deputy foreign minister Aboimov regarded 'the presence of Soviet troops in Hungary an important guarantee of European security' and was worried by statements demanding their full withdrawal.²⁰ Soviet defence minister Dmitrii Yazov asserted that the Warsaw Pact was the only guarantee of European stability and would 'remain strong irrespective of developments in Eastern Europe'.²¹

Gorbachev's concept of a 'common European home' did not envisage European reunification as it ultimately unfolded. In April 1989 high-ranking

Soviet foreign ministry officials explained that Gorbachev's vision was built on 'the respect for European political and territorial realities, [and] the maintenance of the alliances' founded on cooperation. The German question would be solved on the basis of a common German identity but two German states.²² In briefing the Warsaw Pact allies on the Malta summit of December 1989, the Soviet leader declared that although there was an 'objective need for efforts to overcome the division of Europe [it was] unacceptable to realise unity based on the liquidation of socialism and exclusively on the basis of western values, [and] the replacement of the Brezhnev doctrine with a sort of Bush doctrine'.²³ Canadian prime minister Brian Mulroney and Swedish prime minister Ingvar Carlsson had an unofficial conversation with the general secretary a few days prior to Malta. When asked about the possibility of Polish and Hungarian withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact Gorbachev affirmed that there should be no changes in the alliances and that any changes in the alliances 'would be seriously destabilizing'.²⁴ Thus the initiative for liberation had to come from outside the Soviet Union.

Austrian and Italian responses

Neutral Austria, which had built a close relationship with Kádár's Hungary, was sensitive to challenges to Soviet control because of its precarious geographical position, the proximity of Soviet forces and its vulnerability to a potential flood of refugees. Only two days after the MSzMP Central Committee (recognising a *fait accompli*) made the historic decision on 11 February 1989 to accept a multi-party system and the re-evaluation of the 1956 revolution, thereby removing the ruling party's legitimacy, prime minister Miklós Németh explained to chancellor Franz Vranitzky that Hungary would introduce democracy and a 'socialist market system'. Vranitzky stated that 'the danger of domestic changes in Hungary spiralling out of control causes great anxiety in the Austrian leadership'.²⁵ Hungarian diplomacy learned that the Austrian Socialist Party was baffled and deeply troubled by the discussion of neutrality and the question of 1956 underway in Hungary and was sceptical about the possibility of 'real elections'.²⁶ Freedom Party politician, Friedhelm Frischenschläger, stated that 'European stability rested on the status quo'.²⁷ Furthermore, the Austrians emphasised Gorbachev's precarious position and the dire consequences of his potential removal.

Aside from Wiener Allianz president Ernst Baumgartner, who advocated Hungary's return to the principles of Leninism, Austrians recommended slow and predictable democratisation.²⁸ The general secretary of the Austrian foreign ministry Klestil queried Gyula Horn, the Hungarian foreign minister, about the limits of transformation and asked whether these

would lead to tension with the USSR. Austrians feared the ramification of change for themselves. Foreign minister Alois Mock was concerned that the Hungarian decision in February to remove the electronic border fence would increase the number of East European refugees arriving in Austria. Growing financial burdens could lead Austria to alter its refugee policy.²⁹ By mid-summer, Austrian socialists expressed anxiety that the MSzMP might fall to pieces and anarchy would set in, a danger just as real as the reversal of reforms. Their message, as reported by the Hungarian embassy in Vienna, was that 'Hungary should not cause a headache for Europe again'.³⁰ Austrian views remained unchanged throughout 1989. The spokesman for the centre-right Austrian People's Party reiterated that the USSR and the stationing of Soviet troops abroad were important factors in stabilising Eastern Europe, a statement likely prompted by rumours of an impending Romanian attack on Hungary.³¹

Austria was part of Italy's *Quadrangone* initiative (Italy, Hungary, Austria and Yugoslavia) launched in Budapest in November 1989, which was aimed at promoting regional cooperation between Italy, Yugoslavia, Austria and Hungary in the field of industry, science, transport and environmental protection. Italian foreign minister Gianni De Michelis saw this as Italy's way of helping the region to find its place in the 'common European home'. But the project, which received Soviet and American blessing, was not entirely altruistic. Harking back to the old rivalry between Rome and Berlin, an Italian official explained in mid-October that it was 'more advantageous for Hungary to use Italy's mediation towards the EC than Germany's'. One must take into account, he argued, the problems with the balance of power which may arise 'once Germany is unified'.³² The Hungarians were receptive, but problems arose with Yugoslavia and Austria at an early stage. In 1990 the *quadrangone* was broadened into a *pentagonale* when Czechoslovakia joined, but the initiative petered out.

The West German response³³

Even though Kádár claimed to dislike Germans and in the initial years of communist rule in Hungary the FRG, along with the USA, was regarded as the worst enemy of socialism, by the 1980s as a result of *Ostpolitik* relations between Budapest and Bonn were politically close and the FRG was among Hungary's most important economic partners. This was a key component of the German philosophy of *Wandel durch Annäherung* (promoting change through rapprochement), but from the Hungarian perspective the main consideration was the need for economic reform. Indeed, according to some accounts Kádár's removal from power in 1988 was encouraged by the prospect of West German financial aid.³⁴

In the crucial year 1989, politicians in the FRG on both the right and left wing of the political spectrum, like their counterparts elsewhere in Western Europe and the USA, encouraged reforms in Poland and Hungary but were highly concerned about their pace and scope. Eventually Bonn would put strong pressure on Budapest to defy the electorate's will and include the communists in the government and to remain in the Warsaw Pact and Comecon. At their meeting in February 1989 chancellor Helmut Kohl told British prime minister Margaret Thatcher that if events spiralled out of control in Hungary it could upset the balance of power in Europe. He also expressed concern about the country's ability to service its debt. Foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher spoke disparagingly of the Hungarian opposition claiming that it existed only on paper and, unlike in Poland, had no charismatic leadership.³⁵ Genscher was concerned that the West should 'stress' that it would not seek to profit from the problems East European reforms may cause for Moscow.³⁶ In conversations with Hungarian party leaders the West Germans urged self-restraint. The chairman of the Free Democrats, Wolfgang Mischnick, warned that a break with the Warsaw Pact would be tantamount to giving up the chance to implement the reforms.³⁷ Baden-Württemberg's prime minister, Lothar Späth, cautioned against the immediate introduction of a market economy and expressed admiration for the reforms, but regarding the Hungarian opposition he added that 'unrealistic viewpoints were threatening the country's stability'. Foreign minister Horn reassured Späth that Hungary would not leave the Warsaw Pact and, sensing the West German mood, he denigrated the democratic opposition by claiming that they 'operated with Stalinist methods and may cause problems in foreign policy'. Horn also asserted that 'radicals' received support from the US.³⁸ The Federal Republic's cautious stance was affirmed in a conversation between the West German President Richard von Weizsäcker and the US President shortly before Bush's historic visit to Warsaw and Budapest. Weizsäcker declared that 'the reform process in the East must proceed in a controlled manner and not become too turbulent'. He claimed that Poland and Hungary wanted closer relations with the West but also that they intended to stay in the Warsaw Pact. Harking back to the imperial tradition of the twentieth century regarding the international status of Eastern Europe, he suggested that Bush 'have quiet talks with Moscow about the future of Eastern Europe'.³⁹

By then a narrative of transformation in Hungary was taking root in Bonn according to which the reform wing of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party was solely responsible for the changes while the opposition was only jeopardising them by being reckless. In this spirit Volker Rühe, the general secretary of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), told MSzMP President Rezső Nyers, who was complaining about the prospect of a 'right-wing danger', that 'no fundamental reform in Hungary could

have happened without the reform forces of the MSzMP and no other parties could have come into existence without it'. But leaders of the opposition Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) reassured R  he that the communists would be involved in the new government and that the MDF would respect the country's foreign alliances.⁴⁰ The President of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), Hans-Jochen Vogel, after hearing Nyers' warning on the danger of destabilisation and the imminent split in the MSzMP, stated that in normal circumstances he would not welcome the establishment of a strengthened and reformed communist party but 'in Hungary this would be particularly good'. He expressed interest in deep-seated change 'short of chaos' – shorthand for complete regime change. Vogel's thinking was informed in part by concern for Soviet politics: he told Nyers that 'Gorbachev's fall would be tragic'.⁴¹

In June 1989 Kohl reassured Gorbachev that the FRG would refrain from interference in the internal political developments of other states, including Poland and Hungary, 'so as not to plunge Europe back to a time of tension and mistrust'.⁴² In spite of this, he continued to interfere at regular intervals. Kohl was apprehensive that the Hungarian opposition was gaining ground and therefore only a few days after the MSzMP and the opposition agreed to substantive talks on 10 June, he told Gorbachev that the advice he gave in Budapest was that 'the Hungarians [meaning the MSzMP] must not accelerate events otherwise they will lose control and the system will terminate itself'. He added that he 'liked the Bulgarians, particularly Zhivkov'.⁴³ When the chancellor met N  meth in Gymnich on 5 August, the latter appeared ambivalent about Hungary's role in the Warsaw Pact, claiming that neutrality was not part of his party's plans, but any foreign intervention would force him to rethink that position. He also asserted that developments in Poland were causing problems for Gorbachev and revealed that the Soviet leader was putting pressure on the Polish party to stay in power. N  meth then complained about a comment made by Democratic Senator Alan Cranston, who in an interview opined that the precondition of US aid to Hungary was a coalition government. Kohl declared that Bush did not think that way and intimated that he would ask the President to support Hungary. He also affirmed that 'reforms should not be precipitated'. This was also West Germany's message to Poland: Kohl disclosed that the minister of labour was on his way to Warsaw with instructions to tell Lech Wa  sa, leader of the Solidarity movement, to 'keep their [Polish] actions within bounds so as not to endanger reforms'.⁴⁴

After October 1989 Kohl hoped for an arrangement that would allow the ruling party, now renamed the Hungarian Socialist Party following a schism in the MSzMP, to continue to be a part of government. He told Bush that the 'present government was taking an enormous risk: the changes have their origins in the reform movement in the Communist Party

but it is not at all certain that the reformers will be able to get credit in the course of the election ... there might be a coalition'.⁴⁵ Bonn's preference for the reform communists was made known to Budapest. In the chancellor's view, as communicated by political adviser Friedberg Pflüger, stability and predictability were the precondition of helping Hungary. 'The guarantee for all this would be a Socialist-MDF coalition resulting from elections to be held as soon as possible'.⁴⁶ This was a clear attempt at interference in Hungarian domestic affairs in a direction that would undemocratically deny the will of the Hungarian voters just as the pre-election arrangement between the Smallholders and the Communist Party had done in 1945. But regime change would not be scripted in Bonn, or Moscow for that matter. As late as February 1990 the foreign ministry in Bonn 'recommended' that Hungary should stay in the Warsaw Pact and Comecon because any other stance would 'harm' the FRG's talks with the USSR.⁴⁷

The French response

There is plenty of archival material available on French policies towards Hungary. Robert Hutchings has observed that 'Eastern Europe had little place in this [French] strategic vision except as part of the distant goal of a Europe free of the superpowers'.⁴⁸ French historian Thomas Schreiber has written that some French political circles were not enthusiastic after the Polish elections of June 1989 and the opening of Hungarian borders to East Germans in September – president Mitterrand himself remained cautious.⁴⁹ Both statements are supported by Hungarian documentary evidence. Only briefly had Eastern Europe ever played a pivotal role in French policies. From 1920 Paris supported the Little Entente to safeguard France's eastern security – against Germany and Russia – but failed to provide explicit security guarantees.⁵⁰ From the mid-1930s the French backed away from the system they had created in Eastern Europe. Although the 1960s saw a renewed French interest in the region, Paris was not about to take responsibility for it and French economic activity was far smaller than that of West Germany. Mitterrand turned down Kohl's offer of a common policy towards Eastern Europe, even though France was wary of German designs in the eastern half of the continent. Paris may have found it too risky to support changes that threatened to upset stability behind the Iron Curtain. Domestic changes had to satisfy the criteria of stability and predictability.

Initially Mitterrand was forward looking. In November 1988 he talked to MSzMP first secretary Károly Grósz about the need to transcend Yalta and for Europeans to decide on their own fate. Mitterrand stressed the need for cooperation 'against American cultural expansionism on the wings of Japanese technology'.⁵¹ This was perhaps a subtle hint that it was more important to rid France of the USA than to rid the East of the Soviets.

The French response to the abolition of the single party system was cautious. It was reported that because of the anxiety exhibited by political circles regarding the pace of reform, the French company Matra had cancelled its plans to create a joint venture in Hungary.⁵² On 15 February Mitterrand's adviser, Loic Hennekine, told a Hungarian diplomat, László Vass, that Paris supported Hungary's reforms, but did not want these to destabilise the continent, or to lead to political and economic crisis.⁵³ A Hungarian summary of French views emphasised that they deplored 'demagogic' demands such as Hungary's exit from the Warsaw Pact. Paris did not understand why, in contrast to Poland, the government backed down against the opposition. A more gradual, predictable reform process was required.⁵⁴ Although one French official reckoned that in ten years time Hungary might become a member of the European Community, on 28 February 1989 minister of planning, Lionel Stoleru, told the president of the National Planning Office, Ernő Kemenes, that the EC wanted to become a bastion in the economic struggle against the US and Japan and that therefore transition in the East should not impede the strong union of the Twelve. A rapid acceleration of the reforms in Eastern Europe, Stoleru thought, would lead to catastrophe.⁵⁵

In October the MSzMP was dissolved ending the party-state system that had existed in Hungary since 1948. The communists' rapid demise alarmed the French Socialist Party, which opined that the victory of the right wing was not in the interest of Western Europe or Hungary.⁵⁶ On 17 November Elysée secretary-general, Jean Louis Bianco, explained that western assistance to Hungary should not interfere with Hungarian–Soviet relations. The USSR had clarified the limits of East European change, which were the continued existence of the alliances and the inviolability of boundaries, conditions that the US and Western Europe accepted.⁵⁷ Quai d'Orsay director, Jacques Blot, described the dangers of an exclusively German orientation to a Hungarian diplomat arguing that France could provide the right political, cultural and economic counter-balance.⁵⁸ In early December former president Valéry Giscard D'Estaing met state minister Pozsgay. Giscard claimed to agree with Mitterrand that the transition period in Hungary would be lengthy. Membership in the EC required compatible economies and membership in NATO, which according to Giscard ruled out even Austria's entry.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, earlier, in July 1989 Mitterrand had told Bush that 'the Warsaw Pact might have to exist to the end of the century for stability'.⁶⁰

British responses

Alongside France, Britain was the architect of the inter-war order in Central Europe. London had sought to balance the French presence in the

region and had tried unsuccessfully to identify a state on which to build British policy but soon became disenchanted with the successor states and renounced an active regional role.⁶¹ As Geraint Hughes has shown 'traditional British policy towards Eastern Europe ... emphasized stability rather than self-determination ... [as] violent uprisings ... could have a dangerous impact on European security'.⁶² In 1989 London perceived similar threats if the reforms went too far. Hutchings argues that 'British thinking ... saw few prospects for meaningful change and many dangers for the cohesion of the West'.⁶³ Geoffrey Howe, the foreign secretary, admitted that the changes in Eastern Europe raised a number of strategic issues, primarily in western policies towards the Soviet Union.⁶⁴ Initially London suggested that Hungarian reforms might improve Gorbachev's chances. Margaret Thatcher, who had been sceptical about Kádár's reforms,⁶⁵ informed foreign minister Péter Várkonyi in mid-March 1989 that the success of Hungarian *perestroika* could influence Gorbachev's choices and serve as a model for the USSR. The British leader claimed to have told Gorbachev that Hungary was a showcase of socialist transformation.⁶⁶ The phrase 'socialist transformation', a term used by the conservative wing of the reform communists in Hungary, suggested that Thatcher was mindful of Soviet concerns. A few days earlier the British ambassador in Budapest had asked opposition leaders to be more patient with the Hungarian leadership and not cause unnecessary complications.⁶⁷ In September Thatcher assured Gorbachev of her sympathy with the Soviet position according to which reform in Eastern Europe should not question the Warsaw Pact.⁶⁸ In acknowledging Soviet primacy in the region, the prime minister acted in the traditions of British policy towards Eastern Europe since 1944. The Hungarians were told that European stability rested on Soviet security, which enjoyed priority over reforms in Eastern Europe. The foreign office expressed Thatcher's cautious views even more emphatically.

On 11 October foreign office officials explained that the future of Eastern Europe depended on the progress of the USSR, which was the most dangerous state in Eastern Europe and hence needed – for the good of all – to feel secure. The dissolution of the Warsaw Pact would increase the Soviet sense of insecurity with unpredictable outcomes. Therefore Britain attributed great significance to regional stability and advised the reform states to be wary: too many things should not be changed at once, although London hoped to provide economic assistance to Poland and Hungary. The question was how this could be done without jeopardising mutual security. Finally the British declared that they hoped for the presence of reform communists – Pozsgay, Németh, Horn – in the coalition government after the election, which would be able to expect London's support just like Solidarity in Poland.⁶⁹ On 27 and 28 November state secretary of foreign

affairs László Kovács met William Waldegrave, David Ratford and Percy Cradock in preparation for Németh's meeting with Thatcher. The prime minister's dilemma, they informed Kovács, was how to help reforms without 'causing problems for Gorbachev'. Changes had to be 'peaceful and evolutionary' so as not to endanger European stability. They claimed that in her recent talks with Bush, Thatcher had argued that in order to offset the uncertainty caused by the rapid change in Eastern Europe, the two military alliances needed to be preserved while broadening their contacts. Concerning the EC, Thatcher's proposal was a treaty of association for Hungary; in her view, full membership would come only after a long-term change of European structures.⁷⁰

At their meeting on 13 December 1989 Németh claimed that for the first time it was unlikely that Moscow would intervene. The most important thing, he thought, was for Gorbachev to succeed. Although he was under fire, 'the KGB and the army stands behind him'. Németh pleaded for western assistance in the transition, which otherwise stood no chance. Hungary's success could bolster Gorbachev and reforms in other socialist states, while failure could have a negative impact. Németh expressed his gratitude to Thatcher and Bush for avoiding even the semblance of profiting from East European processes. Németh was grateful for a western policy that eschewed strident rhetoric – in contrast to 1956 – but this does not mean that he liked being told to stay in the Warsaw Pact. It is no coincidence that he tried to persuade Thatcher and later Bush that Moscow would not intervene. Had the Hungarian public known about the western stance on the preservation of the status quo, it would have created an outcry.

Thatcher stated that Gorbachev needed Hungary as a positive example as opposed to Poland, which in her view was heading for crisis due to its catastrophic economic state. She emphasised the need for a 'responsible' Hungarian opposition. British aid took the form of a £25 million know-how fund.⁷¹ London's tight-fisted policy was not reserved for Hungary. John Major, briefly foreign secretary in 1989, did not think that Poland should be 'smothered with money'.⁷² According to a Hungarian appraisal in early 1990, London was still worried about destabilisation stemming from radical changes in Eastern Europe and stressed that stability was to be preserved by the two alliances, Soviet security concerns being recognised as legitimate.⁷³ In early 1990 foreign minister Horn told his British counterpart Douglas Hurd that Hungary was 'looking for a new realistic framework of security' with neutrality being a viable option since the USSR no longer offered an 'adequate guarantee' given the uncertainty prevailing there. Hurd emphasised the importance of NATO in guaranteeing a US presence in Europe and in constraining Germany, something which was a 'European interest'.⁷⁴

American responses

The USA was just as apprehensive about change in the Soviet bloc as its European allies. Some of the reasons for this anxiety were the same: fear of an unpredictable future, the possibility of a disorderly devolution of communist regimes leading to chaos, continental destabilisation and Gorbachev's political survival. Where the Bush administration differed was on the question of German reunification. In this crucial respect Washington was bolder than either Paris or London.

Early in the Cold War America had sought to undermine communist regimes in Eastern Europe. After 1956 liberation was discarded and gradually the Soviet occupation of the region was accepted even though the US never renounced democratisation as an eventual aim. Having failed in 1956, Washington was cautious. In 1972 secretary of state William Rogers told Kádár that the US wanted to develop bilateral relations 'as it suits Hungary without disturbing its relations with third countries'. Hungarian–American relations improved over the decades, but still suffered from the remnants of the Cold War: trade controls on the US part, espionage and illegal acquisition of technology by Budapest. Although the Hungarians desperately wanted a relaxation of Cocom restrictions and permanent MFN (most-favoured nation) status, both were denied. The American response to Hungary's critical balance of payments deficit was insensitive. Presidential envoy John Whitehead complained about the Hungarian surplus in bilateral trade. In April 1989, state department officials told a Hungarian diplomat that Hungary 'could not count on large financial support from the US even though political developments could possibly justify it'.⁷⁵

Perhaps the most important development in American–Hungarian relations was the highly positive change in Hungary's image in Washington that took place from the 1970s. The Kádár regime came to be seen as the most liberal of all communist systems and was thought to be popular in Hungary. In May 1989 President George Bush claimed that 'Kádár had been respected in Hungary ... The view of Kádár in the USA was based on his role in 1956 ... but his own view was more tolerant, as was that of the Hungarian people'.⁷⁶ Bush held similar views on Poland's dictator, General Jaruzelski, who he claimed was 'a controversial but widely respected figure in the United States'.⁷⁷ Keeping reform communists in power was not unacceptable and this attitude would shape the American stance towards radical transformation in Hungary and Poland.

Budapest understood that Washington expected predictable, gradual and peaceful change. Deputy secretary of state Lawrence Eagleburger praised Hungarian boldness in opening the Austrian border and expressed sympathy for its reforms.⁷⁸ US sources nevertheless suggested

that Washington anticipated changes to remain under control. Moscow's tolerance limit was thought to be unpredictable.⁷⁹ In May, Bush's visit to Warsaw and Budapest was announced. Soviet reactions were mixed, Shevardnadze welcoming the visit and declaring that Moscow would respect nations' right to choose their own path.⁸⁰ But an article in the Soviet army periodical, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, of 12 May accused the USA of 'driving a wedge between the socialist countries', of 'trying to alter the balance of power on the continent' and of 'casting doubt on European realities'.⁸¹ In a private message on 4 July Gorbachev asked Bush to be 'more considerate if he wants to help'.⁸² Secretary of State James Baker understood that the Soviet position on Eastern Europe required a reserved American posture: 'They do not want us aggressively fomenting change. They will allow change so long as the East European states stay in the Warsaw Pact.'⁸³

Referring to 1956 the president did not want to 'exacerbate problems' in Poland or Hungary.⁸⁴ In his dramatic visit to Budapest Bush stressed non-intervention. Party president Nyers argued that Hungary's freedom of manoeuvre had never been so broad since 1947. Németh claimed that the 'Brezhnev doctrine is dead' and said that Hungarian reforms could strengthen Gorbachev's hand. According to the Hungarian records, Bush, echoing other western leaders, declared that he 'did not mean *to cause problems for Gorbachev* or the Hungarian leadership and has no intention of interfering in the relations between Hungary and its allies'.⁸⁵ In Hutchings' version Bush added, 'the better we get along with the Soviets the better it is for you'.⁸⁶ In Warsaw he delivered a similar message: 'he had not come to Poland to place strain on the Soviet alliance ... The United States would contribute positively to the reforms while stopping short of interference'.⁸⁷ The president met members of the opposition, who made a poor impression. Referring to the modest economic package, Nyers informed Gorbachev that the president's visit had 'left no illusions', but that Bush emphasised American neutrality in domestic affairs.⁸⁸ After his trip to Eastern Europe the President revealed his concern for Gorbachev, telling Dutch prime minister Ruud Lubbers that in Hungary and Poland he had 'stressed that the US offers no threat to Gorbachev'.⁸⁹ The President offered a symbolic sum of money to suggest that the US had interests in Eastern Europe, but at the same time he made it clear that he would not interfere in the Soviet sphere which he regarded as sacrosanct. After his trip to Warsaw and Budapest Bush explained that he did not offer more because he 'did not want the money to go down the drain'.⁹⁰ In late September president Szűrös raised the question of Hungary's neutrality to national security adviser Brent Scowcroft, who reiterated that the USA 'wanted to appear helpful but not provocative'.⁹¹ Almost simultaneously with this meeting the President reassured Soviet foreign minister Eduard

Shevardnadze that that while the USA wanted to support changes towards democracy in Eastern Europe it 'did not want to be reckless or silly about it'.⁹² The American accommodation of Soviet interests involved an effort to keep the communists in power. Bush decided to bring Jaruzelski to the USA to bolster his standing although 'he wanted him to change his glasses'.⁹³ The idea to 'help' Jaruzelski had been proposed by chancellor Kohl.⁹⁴

Beside concern about the Brezhnev doctrine and Gorbachev there was another problem. On 13 September Eagleburger warned that 'reform in the Soviet bloc and the relaxation of Soviet control over Eastern Europe are bringing long-suppressed ethnic antagonisms and national rivalries to the surface and putting the German question back on the agenda'. Eagleburger suggested that the US would not be the key player: 'it is ultimately the Europeans themselves who have the principal stake in making the transition to a new and undivided Europe a peaceful and orderly one'.⁹⁵ Concern about regional security was not unfounded. Hungarian–Romanian relations plummeted and on 19 June the ministry of interior warned the MSzMP leadership of Romanian preparations for military action against Hungary in the autumn.⁹⁶ In this light, Hungarian leaders, including future prime minister József Antall, reaffirmed Hungary's commitment to the Warsaw Pact.⁹⁷ Antall told Aboimov that Hungary wanted 'guarantees' within the alliance 'against potential attack from the neighbourhood ... we cannot exclude the danger of [Romanian] attack'. But Aboimov may have been aware that Hungary was already exploring other possibilities warning his interlocutor that 'any breach of European stability would create a very dangerous situation'.⁹⁸ In his assessment of the Malta summit in December 1989, Gorbachev claimed that Bush 'accepted the stabilising role of the military-political alliances ... and caution was needed in the withdrawal of troops stationed abroad as well'.⁹⁹ At Malta, Gorbachev pledged non-intervention, troop-withdrawal and an opportunity for Eastern Europe to choose its own political system. In return, Bush pledged not to take advantage of the situation.¹⁰⁰ For the time being European security structures would remain. According to state department officials, the alliances would be 'pillars of European security'.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

In 1989 communist rule in Hungary was on the verge of collapse. The only way out of impending economic catastrophe and the ever-increasing domestic pressure for democratisation and the restoration of national sovereignty was for the ruling party gradually to dismantle its dictatorial rule. Archival records reveal what western officials at various levels actually

said about their policies towards Hungary, which can be reconstructed as follows. At least in part the Cold War was about the retraction of Soviet power behind the USSR's boundaries and the reunification of the continent. When the moment came western powers saw both an opportunity and dangers ahead.

Transition from a relatively stable and predictable world to an unpredictable and possibly unstable one was risky. Despite statements in memoirs to the contrary, relations with Eastern Europe were still subordinated to policies towards the USSR. Western leaders *unanimously* repeated that their policies in Hungary were not meant to 'cause problems for Gorbachev'. Fears of German hegemony (amplified by the prospect of unification) and the threat of regional chaos and conflict made a continued Soviet *hegemony* in a democratised and cooperative form an appealing solution. The West, while seeking 'gradual and peaceful' transition to democracy, put stability and peace before full self-determination in Eastern Europe. In the new structure, the two cooperative parts of Europe would be bound together by a network of political, economic and security arrangements, but the division would stay nonetheless. The Soviet military presence in Eastern Europe would be reduced or even eliminated, but the Warsaw Pact would remain. In a broader context insistence on the Warsaw Pact was tied to security concerns. If the Warsaw Pact were dissolved the rationale behind keeping NATO could also be questioned. But the dissolution of NATO would sever the transatlantic security alliance which was inconceivable for western European countries that were concerned with the Soviet and/or German security challenge. Revealingly Mitterrand confided to Bush his fear that 'the USSR could come into France in a few days'.¹⁰²

Moscow gave repeated assurances that the Brezhnev doctrine was dead and that it tolerated democratisation wherever it led. But the Soviets made it clear that they preferred it to stay within the confines of socialism. The West was also willing to see democratic governments under reform communist leadership. Gorbachev hoped to preserve the Soviet bloc in a more democratic form: the Soviet leadership regarded the Warsaw Pact as a pillar of stability and peace. Full troop withdrawal was a long-term prospect. Strange as it may sound, in 1989, for the first time since 1945, there was a meeting of Soviet and western minds about an important aspect of European security. But in the course of that year events in Hungary and Eastern Europe moved beyond this scenario and Moscow refrained from trying to halt the process. The West, in face of the irreversible transformation of the East European scene and German unification would accept the eventual restoration of self-determination and the full loss of communist power in the region. But continental reunification would be a long and painful process for the former subjects of the Iron Curtain.

Notes

- * This is an enlarged and updated version of an essay originally published in Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, N. Piers Ludlow and Leopoldo Nuti (eds), *Europe and the End of the Cold War: A Reappraisal* (Abingdon, 2008), pp. 78–92. Reproduced by permission of Taylor and Francis Books, UK.
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 - 9 Cs. Békés, *Európából Európába – Magyarország konfliktusok kereszt-tüzében* (Budapest, 2004).
 - 10 Mark Kramer, 'The Collapse of East-European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 3)', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2005), pp. 1–24.
 - 11 Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 36.
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 - 13 Cited in M. Baráth and J. Rainer, *Gorbacsov tárgyalásai magyar vezetőkkel* (Budapest, 2000), pp. 178–85.
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 - 15 MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, Szu tük 1989, 83. doboz, 001245/3. Barabás jelentése Palmer és Dobinyin kijelentéseiről, 25 July 1989.
 - 16 Cited in Baráth and Rainer, *Gorbacsov tárgyalásai*, pp. 250–1.

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- 33 I wish to thank Andreas Schmidt-Schweitzer for the Hungarian state security documents relating to FRG policy towards Hungary.
- 34 See V. Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989: The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (New York, 2009), p. 214.
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- 37 MOL 288. f. 32. cs, 44. őe. Feljegyzés Nyers Rezső látogatásáról az NSZK-ban, 24 June 1989.

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- 45 Telephone call from chancellor Helmut Kohl to president Bush, 23 October 1989, http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/memcons_telcons.php (last accessed December 2011).
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Creating security from below: peace movements in East and West Germany in the 1980s

Holger Nehring

This chapter analyses the peace movements in both parts of Germany during the 1980s from a perspective that transcends the ideological and geopolitical divides of the Cold War. In particular, it seeks to explore what the debates on the peace movements might tell us about the security relationships within NATO and the Warsaw Pact. In so doing I want to get us to think about the ways in which conceptualising these movements beyond the divisions that the Cold War created – the divisions in a *free* Western Europe and an Eastern Europe whose elites claimed to be in the process of realising a socialist *peace* – might enable us to gain novel insights into the transition that occurred in 1989. I am interested in highlighting how the protests in both German polities responded to the same historical conjuncture¹: the perception of the renewed threat through nuclear weapons; and how the debates about the protests in both Germanys led to the gradual establishment of non-violence as a core element in German political culture, finding its first expression in the united Germany in the demonstrations against the US military intervention in Iraq in 1991–92. This approach therefore does not regard ‘1989’ as a magic caesura. Rather, it is interested in emphasising continuities in discussions about peace and war in East and West Germany that go beyond a mere analysis of events in 1989–90.

The political conditions in both parts of the country differed fundamentally. While protesters in the Federal Republic were, in general, able to enjoy the freedom to express their views in the context of a pluralist liberal democracy, their counterparts in the GDR faced severe and significant personal and political costs for their actions. Nevertheless, what is striking about the protests is the extent to which they were linked and connected: not only in terms of the themes they addressed and the exchanges of ideas and concepts across the ‘Iron Curtain’, but also in the ways in which governments perceived them as mirror images in the

Cold War for ideas. While the peace movements in the West appeared as the results of communist infiltration, the GDR government interpreted the independent peace movement in the East as a consequence of the infiltration of the country by 'dangerous bourgeois-capitalist pacifists'.

The historiography on the end of the Cold War has so far focused primarily on the role of the two superpowers or on the direct impact of social movements and pressure groups on political processes. The most interesting scholarship has highlighted the importance of transnational actors in influencing Gorbachev's policies and the input of human rights activism following the Conference on Security and Cooperation (CSCE) from the mid-1970s onwards.² Historians have, however, rarely discussed two-way influences, and they have often concentrated on high politics rather than on what might be termed the micro-politics of the Cold War as the set of assumptions, political rules and processes that undergirded diplomacy and governmental decision making on a societal level. Or they have written the organisational histories of peace groups in the GDR.³

The body of historical research that has engaged with peace movements has emphasised the West German peace movement's links with the communist regimes in East Berlin and Moscow, has sought to negate peace and disarmament activists as autonomous actors and has therefore contributed to Cold War triumphalism.⁴ Peace historians have added their own form of triumphalism to the account and have tended to exaggerate peace protesters' direct influence on political decision-making as well as their effectiveness in shaping and directing public opinion more generally.⁵ Likewise, the history of the East German peace movement has mostly been written from the perspective of German unification in 1989–90: many former activists have chosen to re-interpret their campaigns as civil rights, rather than peace activism; and many historians have read the history of the civil rights movement of 1989–90 backwards in order to show its importance, or ignored it altogether in order to highlight the totalitarian character of the GDR.⁶

Parallel histories of peace activism

Protests against nuclear weapons reappeared in West German politics in the context of the discussions over the deployment of medium-range and cruise missiles as well as novel 'neutron bomb' weapons in the mid-to-late 1970s. Various organisations mobilised thousands of supporters, while the Social Democratic (SPD) and Free Democratic (FDP) coalition government discussed the deployment. The protests culminated in large nation-wide demonstrations before, during and after the NATO summit in Bonn. On 22 October 1983, 300,000 activists protested in Bonn, 350,000 in Hamburg and 100,000 in West Berlin. Thousands of protesters formed

a 108km-long human chain on roads between the US forces European Command in Stuttgart and the city of Ulm on the Baden-Württemberg/Bavarian border. Although rarely acknowledged in the literature, the West German protests continued after the deployment of Pershing and cruise missiles in the winter of 1983–84, albeit on a smaller scale. Although the movements were less visible on the national level, peace camps and blockades, still bringing together significant numbers of activists, continued in West Germany from the mid- to the late 1980s. Moreover, many activists gave their protests new forms by campaigning within party and trade union organisations.

In the GDR, peace groups first emerged in the context of the debates about the churches' attitude towards conscription and the GDR government's more accommodating policies towards religion from the 1970s onwards. From the late 1970s and early 1980s, galvanised by the growing fears about the arms race and the Socialist Unity Party's (SED) hardline stance in domestic politics, they began to form a movement that came to be linked through a number of GDR-wide 'peace workshops' and 'peace decades' (*Friedensdekaden*) that sought to capitalise on official peace campaigns by highlighting fears about nuclear weapons in new political contexts. Most prominent amongst these were the campaign 'Swords into Plowshares' from 1980 onwards as well as the 'Berlin Appeal: Create Peace without Weapons' in 1982. After 1983, the Protestant Church held peace seminars that harked back to smaller-scale localised events organised by former *Bausoldaten* in the mid-1970s. *Bausoldaten* (literally 'construction soldiers') were those who had refused on ethical grounds to serve in the army with weapons and were instead placed in units concerned with the building of military infrastructure. *Bausoldaten* were unique to the GDR and did not exist in other Eastern European countries: the arrangement had first emerged out of practical problems and was never formally advertised by the GDR government, however.⁷ The first group to leave the fold and protection of the Protestant Church entirely and organise independently was the 'Initiative for Peace and Human Rights' (IFM), founded in Berlin in 1985.⁸ All these campaigns were supported by an increasingly lively movement across the GDR and a growing *samizdat* press, such as the IFM's journal *Grenzfall* and the *Umweltblätter*. The latter was published by the *Berliner Umweltbibliothek* ('Berlin Environmental Library'), which had been founded in the wake of the Chernobyl catastrophe in 1986, and sought to connect the issues of environmental and peace protests.⁹ Although rarely explicitly acknowledged in the historiography, networks of activists around these groups and journals continued to campaign under the heading of peace *and* civil rights well into 1989: this was true for the protests against the manipulation in the May 1989 elections in the GDR and continued into the autumn of 1989.¹⁰

Peace activism in East and West Germany was intimately connected through the international context in which it emerged from the mid-1970s onwards. It was not only the result of NATO's decision in 1979 to request the removal of a new generation of Soviet SS-20 medium-range missiles from Europe and, if this did not happen, threaten the deployment of intermediate-range missiles. It also accompanied the growing tensions in world politics: the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979, the declaration of martial law in Poland in December 1981 in order to crush the emerging opposition around the independent trade union *Solidarność* (Solidarity) as well as the US interventions in Honduras and Guatemala. Fundamentally, the debate had its origins in the modernisation of nuclear weapons technologies since the late 1960s and the implications this had for the US security guarantee for Western Europe while negotiations between the Soviet Union and the USA on the limitation or even reduction of long-range strategic nuclear weapons had only just begun.¹¹

More generally, peace activism in both parts of Germany emerged when governments attempted to prepare the populations for a new stage in the superpower conflict, through heightened propaganda against the respective Cold War enemy as well as an increase in civil defence propaganda and practice. In the GDR, this went hand in hand with efforts to create a combat-ready and more militarised society through greater attention to military education in secondary schools and a new emphasis on conscription.¹² These debates not only reinforced both societies' sense of alarm about the renewed tensions. They also led to a growing uneasiness and splits within governments – a development that created a multitude of links between governmental, party-political and societal activism. It is true that the Soviet Union had sought to exploit these splits since the mid-1970s by combining a proposal to the United Nations for a treaty on the world-wide non-use of force with a propaganda campaign in Western Europe.¹³ The decisive surge in protest activity occurred only after the Social Democrat Egon Bahr, together with Willy Brandt one of the main architects of *Ostpolitik*, openly criticised chancellor Helmut Schmidt for following US policies too closely and thus giving up German national interests for the sake of the alliance. This criticism first emerged after documents had been leaked that the US government had developed and intended to deploy a new kind of weapon, a 'neutron bomb' that could destroy human beings but would leave buildings intact. While Schmidt had endeavoured to prevent such a debate about nuclear weapons, it was a member of his own government who broke the consensus of staying silent and thus opened geopolitics up for public scrutiny.¹⁴

The link between organised and movement politics could also be seen in the GDR, albeit on different levels and with different intensity. It was only in the context of the fraught discussions between the East German

government and the churches about their role in socialism that significant political space emerged in which peace activists were emboldened to vent their opinions. This created the conditions through which groups were able to develop policies that diverged from the official statements of the SED.¹⁵ For instance, the glaring contrast between the GDR and the Soviet Union's role as 'peace states' and the practice of militarisation of GDR society was first voiced. The peace movements that began to appear in both German polities at this time were responses to the threat of personal and national security that, activists argued, was ignored by their governments. Whereas both governments defined 'security' in terms of an equilibrium of forces between East and West which made the stationing of new weapons necessary, peace activists argued for an 'alternative' form of security that highlighted personal needs.¹⁶ Both populations were already highly sensitised to their 'security' as well as towards environmental issues that transcended national boundaries.¹⁷ And yet what is striking is the extent to which activists interpreted the events from a pronounced German perspective: engagement with protests around the world remained marginal and rhetorical in the West, and even the East German activists showed little reaction to the upheavals in Poland. Rather, it was the GDR government's tightening of security in the wake of the Polish events and the further infringements of freedoms that fuelled their protests.

Peace movement activism was especially controversial in the German–German context. The GDR government regarded itself, by definition, as a peace state – independent peace activism was, therefore, by definition impossible. If it occurred, this meant that not peace, but the undermining of real existing socialism was the aim of activists and hence had to be countered.¹⁸ In West Germany, too, 'peace' had become something of a dirty word: until the early 1970s peace campaigners were confronted with accusations that they acted as communist propagandists with direct support from the GDR.¹⁹ And while peace activism itself and the renewal of policies of detente in the mid-1980s made 'peace' more respectable, the term retained at least some of its negative associations until 1989–90. Hence, at a meeting between the East German Bishop of Saxony, Johannes Hempel, and the Secretary of State for Church Affairs in the GDR, Klaus Gysi, Hempel told Gysi about chancellor Helmut Schmidt's comments: Schmidt was, reports Gysi, quite relieved to hear that there was no independent peace movement in the GDR, as he already struggled to make political sense of its West German counterpart.²⁰

Arguing for peace

Peace movements in the Federal Republic and the GDR challenged their governments' 'geopolitical privacy' (Michael Mann).²¹ While they operated

in fundamentally different systems, both criticised a specific form of 'democracy' that was based on bureaucratic party-political rule and relegated issues of national security to the governmental and administrative apparatus that had emerged after 1945. While the West and East German governments and their supporters highlighted the stability of the arms race, though admitting manageable risks, protesters voiced a different interpretation of the Cold War and the arms race. They emphasised the real and present dangers that nuclear weapons posed and developed an alternative perception of the reality of the Cold War. Thus, movement activists in both the Federal Republic and the GDR envisaged an understanding of violence that went beyond the injury of human bodies by privileging the psychosomatic impact of fears as a much deeper and fundamental form of violence.²²

Accordingly, rather than looking for governmental solutions to these concerns, they sought to transform society by transforming themselves through the themes of reconciliation, tolerance and solidarity.²³ Paradoxically, however, peace activists continued to mirror, not transcend, Cold War politics via their opposition. They behaved as the 'reverse mirror images of the enemy – images of their respective systems'.²⁴ On the surface, much of this activism and the rhetoric appears as the result of a specifically Protestant culture – so much so that one commentator has gone as far as call the protests in Germany in 1989 a 'Protestant Revolution'.²⁵ This reflects the importance of Protestant Christians for the campaigns.²⁶ Yet the broad participation of Catholics in the East and West German protests makes it difficult to take this argument much further. It makes more sense to interpret the peace movements' moral, if not religious, language as a distinctive blurring of the boundaries between religion and politics with the aim of creating legitimacy for the movement and transcending the traditional boundaries of respectable politics.²⁷

Fundamentally, East and West German peace activists highlighted their personal fears and the hope of overcoming that fear through political activism. The imagination of an apocalypse of nuclear death lay at the root of these fears and was frequently linked to an equalisation of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, often elided as 'Euroshima'. The experience of the Cold War and the memories of mass death in the Second World War thus appeared to fall into one. By drawing on these tropes, activists, paradoxically, adopted and furthered a discourse of victimisation that characterised more mainstream memories of the Second World War.²⁸ This formed part of discussions across Eastern and Western Europe in which activists critiqued the danger of nuclear armaments in the context of the debates about the 'exterminist' nature of the Cold War system, a system that threatened to destroy humankind through technical errors or a wilful annihilation by one of the superpowers.²⁹ GDR activists made

similar remarks on the threats stemming from nuclear weapons and, after the Chernobyl incident in 1986, of nuclear power stations as technological threats to global survival.³⁰ Moreover, especially after Gorbachev had announced a new way of organising state socialism in 1987, an increasing number of activists questioned whether Soviet troops should still be on East German soil and cast themselves as victims of an occupation regime.³¹

Through such images of destruction and victimhood, peace movement activists also constructed their fears as the only appropriate way of dealing with a pre-war situation.³² Accordingly, many images, symbols and texts which the peace activists used showed their life-worlds immediately before the nuclear strike. The purpose was to highlight what it was they sought to protect. One typical image that was widely circulated at the time shows a few houses, both detached family homes and small blocks of flats, most 'with red-tiled roofs', but a shadow is faintly visible in the background.³³ At the same time, movement activists regarded their protests and workshops as ways to create peace in the present and their activist community as a way of living the peace then and there.³⁴

East and West German peace movement activists interpreted their own activism within the broader context of an ecologisation of politics, in which different events and processes were intimately, yet often invisibly, connected: the use of nuclear energy to generate electricity and the building and stationing of nuclear weapons as well as other types of environmental damage thus became part of the same phenomenon through which human actions destroyed the ecosystem. Welfare had now been de-coupled from the notion of being and feeling well. Knowledge itself – and technological knowledge in particular – had become dangerous; fear had become a virtue.³⁵

Given the importance of 'peace' as one of the key contested terms of the Cold War, the semantics of peace were, however, highly ambiguous. It was especially obvious with the beginnings of the independent peace campaign 'Create Peace without Weapons' in the GDR (and the West German copy of this slogan) in 1979–80 and of the campaign 'Swords into Plowshares' in 1981.³⁶ The slogan stemmed from the Bible verse Micah 4, 3 which had been engraved into the statue in front of the UN building in New York that the Soviet Union had donated to the United Nations at the beginning of the Cold War in order to highlight its global fight for peace. Western activists who used the slogan and sticker were consequently accused of being communists. In the GDR, by contrast, those who displayed the symbol risked being arrested (even if they removed the actual images and just wore an empty badge), although official GDR publications still carried a picture of the statue and several publications had just interpreted Micah approvingly from the perspective of Marxism-Leninism.³⁷ The same was true for the white dove on a blue background, the symbol of the

communist-sponsored World Peace Council. Conservative commentators in West Germany quoted the symbol as evidence for the proliferation of communist propaganda. In the GDR, however, the government became increasingly worried about the use of the image outside the context of its own organisations.

It is with regard to this issue that the histories of the West and East German movements diverged. Whereas the West German peace movement continued to campaign under its original concept of 'peace', the East German movement, faced with substantial repression, increasingly focused on the domestic dimensions of peace, rather than international ones: the issue of peace thus came to be intricately linked with issues of human rights.³⁸ By highlighting fears that transcended the two superpower blocs, activists challenged one of the key ideological tenets of the Cold War: anti-totalitarianism in the West and the direct link between state socialism and progress in the East. Instead, they stressed one element that had remained submerged: nationalism and the role of the nation-state as decision and identity spaces in domestic and international politics.³⁹ Activists in the GDR and the Federal Republic were united in trying to develop a third way between the superpowers and frequently linked this to a new role for the German nation.⁴⁰ Whereas East German activists could find in grassroots socialism and their struggle for civil rights an alternative to Soviet domination of the Eastern bloc, West German activists filled the conceptual void left by the dissociation from the US and the Western alliance with a renewed emphasis on the German 'nation'.⁴¹

This 'new nationalism' was often linked to demands for the withdrawal of foreign forces from German soil, so that Germany could finally fulfil its mission to create peace in Europe by regaining its sovereignty.⁴² From the mid-1980s, this topic was taken up by East German peace groups, whose members explicitly addressed the implications of such a view for the politics of memory in Germany. 'The division of Germany', argued members of the East German Peace Circle Friedrichsfelde (*Friedenskreis Friedrichsfelde*) in a letter to their West German friends, 'was not the result of the Second World War, but of the Cold War'.⁴³ By expressing protest in this way, both movements fundamentally challenged the boundaries of the political in their respective polities. Stressing the importance of 'direct' or 'grassroots' democracy, they gave voice to a vision of the political process that lay outside the parameters of state socialism in the East and the model of bureaucratic party politics and elections that had emerged in West Germany and Western Europe since 1945.⁴⁴ This conception of 'democracy' found expression in the methods of protest the activists took part in – 'peace camps' and 'workshops' as well as 'dialogues' as forms of politics that privileged bottom-up interactions, rather than top-down discussions according to bureaucratic rules.⁴⁵

The images of democracy and community mirrored the images of war that both movements developed: whereas politics appeared as an anonymous process, devoid of experiences and emotions, protesters highlighted their activism and the emotional warmth of their protest community. Activists in the GDR, in particular, emphasised the role of this community, singing 'We shall overcome!', not only in helping them deal with their fears of nuclear war, but also with the fear of violence meted out by the security forces.⁴⁶

Connections

The similarity of interpretations emerged from a multitude of often complicated and controversial connections between the two movements. They took shape within the contexts of personal and institutional contacts as well as mutual observations through the movement and the mass media. Many of these connections were highly conflictual, as both movements struggled to come to terms with their positions within fundamentally different political systems. Especially the frequent contacts and visits by western peace activists, such as that of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Evangelischen Jugend* (Working Group of Protestant Youth) to the SED and their talks with the official *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth – FDJ) raised many critical eyebrows amongst East German activists.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, connections between the two movements can be traced back to their origins in the mid-1970s when the dissidents Rudolf Bahro and Wolf Biermann were expelled from the GDR and settled in the Federal Republic. The two intellectuals now acted as transmission belts of ideas between the two movements. They professed an environmentally conscious form of socialism that found its realisation in grassroots activities and thus were attractive to both the environmental and peace movements in West Germany as well as the growing peace activism in the East.⁴⁸ Likewise, journalists close to the West German Green Party and with tight links to the East German peace movements, such as Hubertus Knabe, Peter Wensierski and Wolfgang Büscher, ensured that a modicum of reports reached the West German movement and general mass media. In particular, the West Berlin newspaper *tageszeitung* that had emerged out of the social movement milieu in the 1970s turned into a clearing house for information. The Green Party, which had developed from a variety of environmental and peace movements on the state and federal levels between the late 1970s and early 1980s and thus had many natural and personal affinities to the peace activists, was especially open to interactions with East German peace groups, mainly through Marie-Luise Lindemann, Elsbeth Zylla and Willi Magg from its West Berlin branch, the *Alternative Liste* ('Alternative List'). Green politician Petra Kelly made a keen effort to

bridge the 'Iron Curtain', often in the context of the European Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (END). Other connections took place in the more general context between Protestant youth organisations.⁴⁹

Likewise, if and when they were allowed to travel, East German activists tried to make a contribution to West German campaigns. For example, on 10 June 1982 Jürgen Fuchs spoke at a major peace protest in Bonn and, after some internal movement debate, East German peace activist Heino Falcke addressed the big anti-NATO demonstration in Bonn in October 1983. On a more personal level, and connecting ideas of peace with their enactment, the East and West German peace movements organised 'personal peace treaties' between activists in both Germanys in order to achieve 'disarmament from below' and contribute to the demise of the concept of two superpower blocs.⁵⁰

Importance and legacies

The impact of movement activism did not lie in changing high politics. Rather, it lay in the ways in which the movements' challenges to a key element of governmental legitimacy – to guarantee the security of its citizens – led to gradual adaptations within political-cultural assumptions about the role government plays vis-à-vis society.⁵¹ In the Federal Republic, the popularity of Willy Brandt's policies of detente and his support for the peace movement in the early 1980s, meant that 'peace' and 'understanding between East and West' also gradually entered into the governing Christian Democrats' conception of foreign and defence policies later in the decade. Up to the early 1980s, they had strenuously denounced the stress on 'peace' in Brandt's *Ostpolitik* as a sign of his communist past and of the dangerous undermining of West German national security.⁵² This gradual realignment was not simply a function of the vigorous party battles between fundamentalists and modernists within the CDU, but was also the result of an engagement with the ideas that the peace movement and its most prominent opponents professed. The ways in which many of the peace movement activists in East and West linked their activities to the human rights demands of the Helsinki process further contributed to this. Likewise, signs of superpower detente in the mid-to-late 1980s made talking about peace respectable.⁵³ The tentative shift in conservative politicians' attitudes to conscientious objectors that was strengthened by the engagement with the peace movement underlines this: discussions in the CDU – and expressions of this in legislation – moved from notions that conscientious objectors lacked the essential quality of citizens ready to die for their country towards ones that highlighted commitment to social service in the local community.⁵⁴ Together with the growing success of the recently founded Green Party in state and federal elections, these changes in party-political

attitudes mirrored a more general trend in West German public opinion towards non-violent conceptions of statehood and government that had already begun in the debates on 'terrorism' in the 1970s and had now reached significant proportions. These conceptions emphasised the role of government in society as an essentially non-violent one.

Similar shifts occurred in the GDR. Due to the fundamentally different character of the political system, however, the ambiguities of such non-violent definitions of government were thrown into much sharper relief. While the SED, the secret services and the police forces, confronted with peace activism, were increasingly at pains to avoid any violent clashes and were under increasing pressure to justify it where it happened, governmental control now took on an entirely different and much more sinister form. Rather than trying to jail members of the opposition, the SED government sought to retain its domestic legitimacy and international reputation by attempting to infiltrate peace groups with secret service agents and instigate debates that would occupy peace movement activists with themselves rather than with the issues. This led to betrayals even amongst married couples and within families. At the same time, instead of using criminal law as a measure against the activists, the GDR regime shifted the focus to public order legislation. As a result, several activists were arrested. The most prominent were probably Ulrike Poppe and Bärbel Bohley who were kept at the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen secret service prison for six weeks before they were released in the wake of protests by western governments and news media.⁵⁵

While a period of pronounced toleration of peace and environmental groups began after the discussions between the SPD and the SED on a common socialist heritage and Erich Honecker's visit to the Federal Republic in 1987, direct suppression continued nonetheless. In September 1987, police raided the environmental library in Berlin and independent demonstrations on 17 January 1988 to mark the anniversary of the killing of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht led to arrests of a number of activists and the expulsion of others. It was only during the wave of protests in the summer and autumn of 1989 that the turn in rhetoric came to be connected with changes to actual practices: given the size and resilience of the protests and the international context – the lack of Soviet support for an armed backlash, the contemporaneous non-violent protests across Eastern Europe – the GDR government and the security services could no longer plausibly justify violent actions. Whereas before the summer of 1989, many of the party-controlled media had labeled the peace and civil rights protesters 'rowdies', this term lacked any credibility as entirely peaceful and pronouncedly disciplined protesters held vigils, prayed in public and displayed posters 'we are not rowdies, we are non-violent'. The repercussions this had on the legitimacy of the state security apparatus

among both its members and the general public were enormous. They led the SED to modify its position, especially because it had, from September 1989 onwards come under growing international scrutiny by the western news media. The media were sensitive to this issue as the Tiananmen Square massacre in China in June 1989 had drawn significant criticism and had already become a topic in the GDR protests.

Although party newspapers still called activists 'dangerous rowdies bent on violence' in early September and while Honecker had prepared the security forces for a national state of emergency, by early October 1989 the situation looked decisively different.⁵⁶ The cold civil war had turned real on Dresden's streets at the beginning of the month, leading to much bloodshed between protesters and the police around the railway station.⁵⁷ But rather than strengthening the government's authority, widespread criticism of police action even from within the ranks of the SED, led to a remarkable change in tone.⁵⁸ Even party newspapers now emphasised the non-violent character of the demonstrations and demanded: 'No violence!' Dialogue emerged between protesters, local party representatives and government officials in towns and cities across the country.⁵⁹ At the same time, Honecker's position in the party became increasingly weak, as a group of SED politicians around Egon Krenz and Hans Modrow promoted similar dialogues on a national level and ultimately toppled him on 18 October 1989 as SED Secretary General.

For the short period between autumn–winter 1989 and the local and state elections in spring–summer 1990 this process fostered the emergence of a specific type of movement society within what was still formally the GDR. It took the form of ad hoc participatory democracy that circumvented more highly organised means of politics: dialogues on the local, regional and national levels, symbolised by the metaphor of the 'Round Table' (*'runder Tisch'*) that sought to carry not only the content, but also the form of the protests forwards.⁶⁰

The different contexts in which East and West German protesters operated led to a disjuncture between East and West German politics in 1989, which expressed significant differences in the temporalities of the last decade of the Cold War. Although non-violent conceptions of government and statehood had become influential in both political systems, they possessed divergent meanings. Whereas they had percolated through West German political culture and thus lost most of their oppositional potential, in East Germany peace campaigns had become aligned with movements for civil rights. In West Germany, activists had, paradoxically, learned to live with the Bomb. The top-down structure of the GDR's political system denied East German activists that opportunity. Although GDR governmental discourse and, from the autumn of 1989, practices shifted towards non-violent conceptions of rule and moved away from direct and

violent interventions at demonstrations, the political system remained a 'dictatorship of borders' (Thomas Lindenberger) in which the forms and content of politics were not only limited discursively (as in the West), but also in the shape of 'hard power' and direct regulation. Even in the autumn of 1989, the space for what counted as legitimate politics in the eyes of the SED remained, therefore, much more narrowly drawn than in the Federal Republic; and demonstrating for peace itself was automatically a claim for fundamental civil rights.⁶¹ Such claims came to be directly linked to the Wall as the symbol and manifestation of the borders that structured life in the GDR. When East German activists campaigned for an end to visualising international politics in a bipolar way, they always meant the geographical scope of the East German polity, too, even if they wished to maintain a distinct identity from the Federal Republic.⁶² The fact that East German activists had connected their fears and desires to create peace with demands for basic civil rights and more far-reaching forms of participatory democracy that could not be channeled into the framework of the GDR's political system meant that for them the Cold War ended later. And yet, peace activism and the discussions about it on both sides provided the conditions for the end of the Cold War and the *peaceful* character of the revolution of 1989–90.

The author would like to thank Professor Benjamin Ziemann (Sheffield) for many past fruitful collaborations and conversations.

Notes

- 1 Cf. the conceptual suggestions by C. Kleßmann, 'Verflechtung und Abgrenzung: Aspekte der geteilten und zusammengehörigen deutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B29–30, 16 July 1993, pp. 30–41.
- 2 M. Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca, 1999); T. Risse-Kappen, 'Did Peace through Strength End the Cold War?', *International Security*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1991), pp. 162–88; D. C. Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton, 2001); S. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War* (Cambridge, 2011).
- 3 See T. Klein, 'Frieden und Gerechtigkeit!': *Die Politisierung der Unabhängigen Friedensbewegung in Ost-Berlin während der 80er Jahre* (Cologne, 2007); M. Nooke, *Für Umweltverantwortung und Demokratisierung: Die Forster Oppositionsgruppe in der Auseinandersetzung mit Staat und Kirche* (Berlin, 2008); M. Subklew-Jeutner, *Der Pankower Friedenskreis. Geschichte einer oppositionellen Gruppe innerhalb der*

evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR 1981–1984 (Osnabrück, 2004); and M. Kluge, *Das Christliche Friedensseminar Königswalde bei Werdau: Ein Beitrag zu den Ursprüngen der ostdeutschen Friedensbewegung in Sachsen* (Leipzig, 2004).

- 4 See J. Herf, *War by Other Means: Soviet Power, West German Resistance and the Battle of the Euromissiles* (New York, 1991); J. Maruhn and M. Wilke (eds), *Die verführte Friedensbewegung: Der Einfluss des Ostens auf die Nachrüstungsdebatte* (Munich, 2001); M. Ploetz and H.-P. Müller, *Ferngelenkte Friedensbewegung? DDR und UdSSR im Kampf gegen den NATO-Doppelbeschluss* (Münster, 2004).
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- 6 See the review article by G. Dietrich, 'Literaturbericht: Opposition, Widerstand und Bürgerbewegung in der DDR', *H-Soz-Kult*, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/type=rezbuecher&id=1764> (last accessed 1 June 2011) as well as I.-S. Kowalczyk, *Endspiel. Die Revolution von 1989 in der DDR* (Munich, 2009).
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- 8 See the overview in K. H. Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 33–44.
- 9 See I.-S. Kowalczyk (ed.), *Freiheit und Öffentlichkeit: Politischer Samisdat in der DDR. Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin, 2002).
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- 16 See, for example, the Krefeld Appeal (16 November 1980), in

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 - 18 See Akademie für Staats – und Rechtswissenschaft der DDR (ed.), *Unser Staat* (East Berlin, 1989), p. 185.
 - 19 See A. Doering-Manteuffel, ‘Im Kampf um “Frieden” und “Freiheit”: Über den Zusammenhang von Ideologie und Sozialkultur im Ost-West-Konflikt’, in H.-G. Hockerts (ed.), *Koordinaten deutscher Geschichte im Zeitalter des Ost-West-Konflikts* (Munich, 2003), pp. 29–48.
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 - 28 B. Ziemann, ‘The Code of Protest. Images of Peace in the West German Peace Movements, 1945–1990’, *Contemporary European History*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2008), pp. 252 and 254; and Ziemann, ‘Quantum of Solace’, pp. 363–4, developing an argument from M. Geyer, ‘Cold War Angst: The Case of West-German Opposition to Rearmament and Nuclear Weapons’, in H. Schissler (ed.), *The Miracle Years. A Cultural History of West Germany 1949–1968* (Princeton, 2001), pp. 376–408.
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 - 47 See IZJ 11.225, Informationen zum Aufenthalt des Vorstandes der AEJ in der BRD und in Berlin West (AEJ) vom 13.–16. April in der DDR.
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- 53 See the reports in *Die Zeit*, 31 October 1980 and *Die Welt*, 30 October 1980. By contrast, see Deutscher Bundestag, Drucksache 8/1014, 68. Anfrage Dr. Mertes (20.9.1977), p. 40.
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The demise of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, 1987–89: a socio-economic perspective

Michal Pullmann

The collapse of the communist regimes in 1989–91 reopened critical questions on the bases of stability and roots of discontent in modern societies. The unexpected destabilisation of the system, the loss of legitimacy of ‘real existing socialism’ and the pursuit of a new consensus on basic values marked a specific laboratory for analysing a potential ‘grammar’ of disrespect and contention. Introduced originally in the Soviet Union in the mid-1980s, the reforms of *perestroika* unleashed a floodgate of criticism of ‘real existing socialism’ and subverted its ideological purity, while intending to preserve and perfect socialism.¹ *Perestroika* was also officially adopted in Czechoslovakia and preceded the rapid collapse of the system. The main difference was that the Czechoslovak communists introduced *perestroika*-style economic reforms, but without *glasnost* (openness). That is, they aimed to imitate the Soviet attempt to reform the centrally planned economy, while avoiding political democratisation.² In this chapter I aim to examine the evolution of Czechoslovak *perestroika*, specifically how the discourse of socio-economic reforms gradually undermined the rhetoric and self-perception of the regime and facilitated its ultimate collapse.

Despite the dissimilarities between the two countries, economic critiques of state socialism and of everyday scarcities and inefficiencies played a crucial role in discrediting and delegitimising the existing system. The Czechoslovak economy was among the most advanced in the socialist bloc, but comparisons with western standards resulted in a plethora of complaints, regarding the low quality of labour, poor wages, shortages of goods, endless queuing and striving for essentials, chronic delays and distortions, and administrative tutelage. By the late 1980s even leading Czechoslovak party officials recognised that: ‘Of course, we do not have a bad standard of living, if we compare it with Poland, Bulgaria or Hungary.

But the comparison with Austria or Switzerland is not favourable for us.³ Although these grievances were not entirely new at the time of *perestroika* – indeed, they are applicable to the entire history of state socialism – they acquired an unexpected dynamic and became the main and most visible factor in the delegitimisation and eventual demise of the system.

In this respect, the transformation and radicalisation of public criticism are of cardinal importance in deciphering the collapse of Czechoslovak communism. They show that expert and popular viewpoints and attitudes outgrew the framework of socialist codification and challenged the normative purity of ‘real existing socialism’. Despite the moderation shown in formulating criticism and posing possible alternatives, this critical renewal engendered a broad array of experiences and expectations that were incompatible with the old normative denominator of ‘developed socialism’. This dispersal of attitudes and basic assumptions, in effect disintegrating the foundations of the social consensus, makes it possible, retrospectively, to reconstruct the social and cultural basis of the decline of the Czechoslovak communist regime.

The efforts to introduce economic reforms must thus be conceived not only as attempts to solve the structural problems of administrative control over the economy, but also as strategies to arrest, or at least compensate for, the erosion of legitimacy of the state socialist system itself with all its scarcities, shortages and low product quality.⁴ The Czechoslovak government had tried to introduce certain reformist principles in the economy ever since the end of the 1970s.⁵ Although these pre-*perestroika* arrangements ultimately failed,⁶ they brought new critical notions to public debate, first to the expert milieu, and more gradually to the popular sphere.

Important topics and ideas were mooted, such as the predictability of production (the integration of enterprises in the drawing up of plans), material incentives, wage differentiation, a need for maximal efficiency, optimal development and others. ‘Intensification’, which had been developed earlier, especially in the 1960s, became a keyword in the middle of the 1980s on the back of the slowdown of economic production, which increasingly challenged the practice of extensive growth and the existing command system.⁷ Hence, alternatives came to the fore such as ‘intensive growth’, a new structure of investments, improving ‘commodity–monetary relations’ (a term introducing markets), supporting ‘individual motivation factors’ (a euphemism for material incentives), and the structure of wages and prices. Formally, these critical diagnoses were designed according to the older model of the Brezhnev era. Espousing the official vocabulary of ‘developed socialism’ and declaring the principled supremacy of socialism, they usually complained about the quality of goods and services, the deficient automatisisation of production or insufficient qualifications in some professions. The notions of ‘effectiveness’⁸ and ‘improvement’⁹ acquired a

central legitimising significance, heralding and justifying propositions such as individual material incentives ('material interestedness in production'), the implementation of new technologies ('intensification of technological innovations'), sustaining market conditions, or at least some principles of it ('economically objectifying value instruments such as prices, exchange rates, interests and credits') and even a desirable differentiation in wages ('revision of the index-structure regulating the development of wages'). On paper, these claims had been discussed since the 1970s. Yet the implementation of any changes in the central command economy – especially if questioning the stable hierarchies – was very difficult, and usually ineffective. The central party organs in Czechoslovakia knew this very well and were thus inclined to launch a kind of 'repressive' economic reformism, combined with restraints on civil rights aimed at preventing political destabilisation.

Reformist endeavours of *perestroika*

The rhetoric of *perestroika*, as we have seen, was deciphered in an ambiguous way in Czechoslovakia. On the one hand, it opened up the possibility of higher efficiency in the socialist economy by introducing more stringent terms and measures. On the other, it posed a real threat to the existing hierarchies of power. The Czechoslovak party leadership prevaricated until early 1987, because at the beginning of Soviet *perestroika* it was still not clear whether or not a rhetorical campaign would have practical results. Only when Gorbachev completed wide-scale personnel changes in the central Soviet institutions did the Czechoslovak authorities accept the fact that *perestroika* was going to be something substantive.¹⁰ As a result, in the spring of 1987 a reform project was initiated designed as a departure from the principles of strict centralisation and self-sufficiency of the small Czechoslovak economy.¹¹ The reformist package envisaged some degree of decentralisation and implementation of market elements into the economy, introducing notions such as profit, price reform, expansion of foreign trade and wage differentiation. It also brought a new codification and modified system of management.

Between 1987 and 1989 a number of acts were adopted, challenging old relations and hierarchies. In November 1987 the government passed a decree clumsily entitled 'Instructions on implementing the complex rebuilding of the economic mechanism' which encapsulated the conceptual and rhetorical framework of all *perestroika*-era reforms in Czechoslovakia.¹² In general, it stressed the acceleration of economic and social development, improvement in the dynamics and balance of the economy, the self-financing of enterprises, a new qualitative growth, a rational reordering of the central organs and a strengthening of the position of

economic organisations and planning by means of a value system, instead of direct command. It was even designed to question the very principle of redistribution. An earlier decree from October 1987 envisaged major changes to 150 legal regulations, all of which were adopted within a few months.¹³ The law on state enterprises and the act on housing, consumer and production cooperatives were the two most important pieces of legislation of the entire reform package of Czechoslovak *perestroika*. All other legal regulations were foreseen and introduced – the law on agricultural cooperatives, amendments to the labour and economic codes and a new act on economic planning.¹⁴

The main aim of the legislation was to create a new economic environment entailing a degree of independence and greater flexibility for companies, eliminating difficulties in general efficiency, augmenting incentives for new economic activities and, at the same time, guaranteeing protection of entrepreneurial efforts, accompanied by more stable conditions. The act on housing, consumer and production cooperatives legalised the establishment of small-scale businesses and thus promoted a certain decentralisation of the commercial environment. Indeed, a number of Czech and Slovak companies of the 1990s had their origins in 1988 and 1989: established as cooperatives, they turned their legal status into Ltd. or Inc. in 1990 and continued to do the same, or similar business, as they had before 1989.

Economic experts and managerial classes

Public discussion of the draft act on state enterprise became an important event in 1987 not only in terms of economic relations, but also in respect to popular criticism.¹⁵ For experts in the state apparatus, the draft was a welcome chance to consider and contemplate fundamental reforms of an ineffective economy. Even though the draft was originally designed according to the Soviet model, government experts decided to amend it later in favour of the old version of the act from 1969 (which was never implemented).¹⁶ Yet its most important and far-reaching terms, such as a 'shared enterprise' which was envisaged and designed as a kind of stock corporation, were removed before submitting the draft to public debate. Despite this, it was innovative enough within the administrative system and provoked many reactions, especially in specialist and managerial circles.

For the experts in the executive organs, the discussion was a welcome opportunity to introduce reformist ideas and acquaint the public with their goals. The core criticism went against the very practice of administrative tutelage – the setting of plans in the state apparatus and the control of materials and goods beyond the primary requirements of companies and customers. Experts emphasised the imperative of balance between supply

and demand (instead of a 'demand' economy), which would meet the needs and desires of customers rather than adhering to the bureaucratic state plan, and for changes to the provision of subsidies and redistribution so that efficient companies would not suffer because of unprofitable ones. From this point, it was easy to call for the practice of floating prices for certain goods in an effort to drive economic interests.¹⁷ The vocabulary used was still quite cautious, using phrases such as 'in favour of socialism', 'Soviet economic science' and 'the contribution of Marxist theory', but in their content the texts broke the ideological purity of 'scientific' communism. Thereafter, neither the principle of administrative distribution of goods and materials nor the claim on state control over the means of production and prices were axiomatic tenets marking the inexorable path to communism. Experts stated openly that the administrative system of controlling the economy was the main reason for its continuing problems and was thus unsustainable in the future.

In practical terms leading economic experts, such as Valtr Komárek, sought to reduce 'extensive' branches of the economy such as the steel industry and provide support for the more qualified areas, including the textile, shoemaking, glass and polygraph industries.¹⁸ Moreover, the biggest financial problem consisted in a parallel 'double' taxation – a company was taxed initially on the property increase, and then on its profit. This practice not only stymied initiative and enterprise, but also turned the primary interest of companies towards fuelling wages and minimising investment, thus avoiding increased taxation. This was the reason behind the well-known fact that central authorities 'drove enterprises even by force, for example, through directives of obligatory investments'.¹⁹ Expert opinion ranged from differentiating the ways of calculating property, through proposing diverse forms of taxation (progressive by the profit and linear by the property), to the possibility of cancelling altogether the taxation of socialist property.

Although this expert criticism was sometimes quite harsh, the most urgent voices were those of the managerial classes. Their basic interests were in danger. The draft law on state enterprises envisaged elements of socialist democracy in production – workers' councils were to be founded with the mandate to take part in management and even to elect and remove directors. It is no wonder that the latter, and the managerial classes per se, raised their voice vigorously. On the one hand, they most certainly approved the basic principle that net profits should belong to the enterprise, could be used independently and should not be ring-fenced. This was considered a guarantee of the 'mobilisation of reserves' and of the shift towards 'effectiveness'. The main goal was to weaken the ability of the state authorities to interfere in the production process and strengthen the 'economic aspect' of enterprises. The creation of development funds

(investments, technical advancement, repairs) had an imminent importance here – there were even calls to declare it compulsory as it could ensure the technological development of enterprises. Also, the chance of involving firms in foreign trade, without the duty of using state-controlled trading companies, raised much interest since the prospect of creating independent foreign currency funds at the company level was something unprecedented.²⁰

On the other hand, the idea of establishing self-governing bodies in enterprises raised genuine panic among managerial circles. Even the fact that the (re)introduction of ‘socialist self-government’ was predicated on sound Marxist vocabulary (the restoration of ‘socialist democracy’ and ‘Leninist virtues’ together with strengthening the identification of workers with production), did not prevent managers from strongly criticising it. Directors did not hesitate to invoke all manner of objections to defame the principle of self-government and warn of its consequences. The easiest way to challenge the idea was to call for ‘discipline and control ... [The organs of self-government] should not turn into debating clubs’. Moreover, bodies such as employees’ councils and trade unions were impugned, their overly complex mutual relations were attacked and the difficulties of sharing responsibility between management and workers’ councils were given full vent. Already at this point, it was possible to assert direct claims: ‘I propose to delete it’,²¹ or ‘I propose to retain the competencies of the executive body of the board of management’.²² The managerial classes knew that their power was at stake. Negotiations with state authorities and party organs cost much energy and invention. But now directors were on the verge of having to negotiate with employees.

The ‘leading role’ of the party

Communists in the central apparatus of the party had their own worries. They were concerned about the leading role of the party and how to safeguard the influence of loyal communists in the self-governing bodies while simultaneously maintaining their authority over managerial circles so that enterprise directors remained responsible to the Central Committee of the party. At the November 1987 session of the Economic Commission of the Central Committee it was clear that party elites were unwilling to undertake vigorous action. The main proclamations still conformed to conventional rhetoric – ‘support for submitted documents’, ‘constructive suggestions’, ‘positive evaluation’, ‘general support’ and ‘broad public discussion’.²³ Yet behind these verbalisations there lay a remarkable shift in the formulation of views in that the strategic aspect suddenly became more visible than before. When evaluating public discussion, the leading role of the party was continually asserted. It seemed clear what was wrong with the debates – the date of publication was ‘inappropriate’, the party’s and

unions' 'action committees' were not 'theoretically prepared' and given sufficient instruction, discussion had not taken into account 'the extent of the administrative apparatus', it was inadequately interlinked with the 'whole reconstruction of the economic mechanism' and the 'theoretical front' was 'deficient' in terms of preparation and elaboration.

The contrast with the willingness of experts and managers to articulate criticism could not be clearer. Earlier, in the 1970s, such notions had been accompanied by detailed party instructions designed to reclaim appropriate ideological interpretations and train functionaries in theoretical understanding. Yet in 1987, they reflected, at least in the closed sessions of party commissions, the general helplessness of the highest 'cadres' and a lack of elite consciousness and self-confidence in decision-making. Though discussion on content and strategies was not completely absent – doubts were expressed about the relationship of directors with workers' committees and attempts were made to defend huge complexes, stressing the 'tested' system of its 'supplier functions'²⁴ – there was neither conceptual nor strategic competency to ensure the public dissemination of 'socialist' views, schemes and vocabulary. Apart from the ineffectiveness of the state socialist economy, something even more delicate was at stake – namely, the very ideological tools that would enable late communist elites to justify mutual goals and cooperate efficiently.

The working classes

Among industrial workers, references to reforms, and to *perestroika* in general, were usually bound to specific experiences and problems. Initially, responses to the announced reforms were cautious: workers conceded that 'we do not know yet what is going on. Radio and TV reports about it are unclear ... Often we hear opposing views. If we want to stimulate the initiative of workers, it is necessary to clarify what's the point of it'.²⁵ Later, as new vocabulary was established, critical attitudes and grievances began to appear publicly far more often on television and in the newspapers. Wages were in the limelight, most frequently complaints about low salaries. There were also concerns about the future development of working conditions. Interestingly, the images and claims were nearly always tied to a specific group (textile workers, metal workers); they almost never represented the whole working class. Declared common class interests were very rare among workers.

The new law on state enterprises in particular gave rise to many thorny questions and anxious discussions, mainly on unemployment and the weak position of the trade unions. However, there was no symbolical tool to bring these attitudes together through a common denominator – 'official' symbols were obsolete and new ones were not yet constituted. Paradoxically, the

fixation of worker demands on economic issues – individual effort versus the differentiation of wages – and the fragmentation of these demands in isolated branches and segments of the working class exactly corresponded to party leadership intentions: to avoid the political consequences of *perestroika* and channel reformist strivings into the economic sphere. The dominant reactions of workers very rarely went beyond the field of their particularist concerns and failed to find new ways of articulating a broader social critique. In this respect, they did not represent a direct menace to the party elite.

Artists and intellectuals

The project of *perestroika* unsurprisingly engendered a variety of responses in intellectual circles. At the beginning of the campaign, reactions were carefully couched in standard terms and phraseology: ‘strategy of acceleration’, ‘new thinking’, ‘intensification of production’, and the ‘acceleration of scientific-technical progress’. Intellectuals were extremely wary because any incautious formulation could create huge problems and even bring a promising career to an end. Apart from this, the imagery inherent in *perestroika* vocabulary of a building in need of redesign so that the separate elements fit each other was difficult for intellectuals to use as a means of articulating their general interests. Still the humanist intelligentsia was able, by 1987 at the latest, to elaborate quite harsh critiques, especially in regard to the autonomy of the arts and sciences, claims for a less ‘centralised’ culture and hence the weakening of party-state ideological control.

The strategies adopted by intellectual critics were broadly similar to other social groups, but were marked by greater inventiveness. The basic plan consisted in using well-worn clichés like ‘overcoming stagnation’, ‘a conflict between the old and new’, the necessity of ‘solving problems’ and ‘talking openly and concretely about reality’.²⁶ But in a more proactive way, it was also possible to attack ‘egoism’, ‘disinterest in public affairs’ and the breaking of basic moral imperatives such as ‘truth’ or ‘wisdom’. Only seldomly, and always with a high risk of being persecuted, did intellectuals express a more general critique of the system installed after the Soviet occupation in August 1968 or appeal for communists to give up their positions and thus make the real transformation of socialism possible.²⁷ As Miloš Kopecký, a popular Czech actor, stated in 1987 against the communist establishment:

Just as it is difficult to arrive at the right time, so it is no less difficult to leave. You [communists] have done many respectable things, but you have to be the first to understand that your time is up. If you understand this,

you can leave perhaps tragically, but with dignity ... If you leave [your positions] now, meaning immediately, you can still be thanked. If you do not ... you will leave anyway later ... not with dignity, but as comical figures. If the fate of socialism is as important for you as you always stress, you have an excellent opportunity to do something good for socialism: resign.²⁸

Despite immediate state intervention and censorship, Kopecký's text circulated on home-made recordings and became popular throughout the republic. It articulated the commonplace intuition that the time of the communist establishment was up and that the geriatric leadership of the party should resign and leave space for somebody else.

However, intellectuals were active not only in implicit or explicit critiques of the political hierarchies, but also in introducing new themes or radicalising existing ones within the public sphere, issues such as ecology, homosexuality, new directions in popular culture (rock music, heavy metal and western fashion) and everyday violence in socialist society.²⁹ They often undermined conventional party ideological formulas. For instance, many negative phenomena – environmental problems, violent practices in daily life – were depicted neither as relics from pre-socialist times nor as imports from the western world, but rather as integral components of socialism itself. In these ways, the exclusivity and hitherto purity of orthodox ideology in the public realm were shattered – negativities were seen as immanent to socialism and means had to be found to deal with them. Thus, considerable pressure was brought to bear on the realm of ideology in the final months of the communist regime. Aside from the party-state establishment, there was hardly a social group that was keen on rescuing the official ideology. Rather, many agents were testing alternative or new ideological principles (liberal, ecological, nationalist or conservative) and examining their potency to articulate their needs.

The 'internal enemy'

The decline of official ideology was reflected in the increased attractiveness of various dissident groupings in Czechoslovak society, notably Charter 77. Oppositional movements or non-conformist churches did not give much credence to partial economic reforms but expressed in the form of an alternative language a general intuition that changes must be fundamental and not just specifically economic. In this respect, they challenged the very ideological purity of state socialism and thus threatened the fragile stability of the dictatorial system.³⁰

By the mid-to-late 1980s, oppositional groupings were growing in number, addressing a wide variety of themes and promoting a range of

‘subversive’ values. Soviet *glasnost*, regardless of the fact that it was never officially adopted in Czechoslovakia, inspired many people to debate historical ‘blank spots’. These were not primarily Soviet issues, such as the forced migrations, labour camps and mass executions of the Stalinist period, but, rather, controversial aspects of Czechoslovak history. For instance, the first Czechoslovak democratic president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, became a veritable hero for the Society of T. G. Masaryk (*Společnost T. G. Masaryka*). Even more unpalatable for the communist authorities was the realisation that the memory of the Prague Spring was still very much alive among its protagonists, nearly all of whom had been expelled from the party after 1968. At the turn of 1988–89 these ex-communists founded Revival – the Club for Socialist Renovation (*Obroda – Klub za socialistickou přestavbu*). Though rather limited in its scope and influence, the socialist opposition was especially dangerous for the regime because it addressed central ideological issues (socialism, democratic centralism, social rights) and thus threatened its normative purity. Others, such as the Association of Friends of the USA (*Společnost přátel USA*), the Independent Peace Association (*Nezávislé mírové sdružení*), the Czechoslovak Helsinki Committee (*Československý helsinský výbor*), the Democratic Initiative (*Demokratická iniciativa*), and the Movement for Civil Freedom (*Hnutí za občanskou svobodu*) all espoused a different notion of rights, stressing civil over social rights, and promoted a different vision of peace, even criticising the Soviet arms build up.³¹

Churches, especially in Slovakia and Moravia, were an important resort for many young people. They were not as powerful as in East Germany, but religious symbols and values were often raised against the emptiness of official communist ideology. By the late 1980s the Decade of Spiritual Renewal (*Desetiletí duchovní obnovy*), a Catholic pastoral programme, attracted large numbers of young people who increasingly attended masses, pilgrimages or specific religious celebrations such as that of St Agnes of Bohemia.³²

The party leadership was helpless to counteract the growing popularity of dissident groupings, underground activities and religious life. Given the backdrop of Soviet *glasnost*, it was suddenly unclear whether the exclusion of oppositionists would be possible in future. *Glasnost* was bad news for Czechoslovak communists because it rehabilitated former dissidents, such as Andrei Sakharov, and abolished censorship. While many Soviet leaders thought it could regenerate and renew the positive message of socialism, Czechoslovak communists, installed in their seats after the occupation of 1968, knew it marked the ultimate end of their power monopoly and thus an end to state socialism. No wonder they appealed to the Soviet leadership to insist on the official interpretation of the Prague Spring as a ‘counter-revolutionary coup’ thwarted by the ‘fraternal assistance’ of Soviet and

Warsaw Pact troops.³³ Apart from bemoaning the threat of anarchy and general breakdown both in the country and in the broader European context, the Czechoslovak party leaders did not have much going for them. When negotiating in Moscow, they could make a pretence of stability in Czechoslovakia, of popular support for the communist party. Yet it was much more difficult to cope with the domestic situation and prevent the people from participating in dissident activities.

Indeed, in June 1989 a *samizdat* newspaper published the declaration *Několik vět* ('Several sentences'), which advocated basic civil rights such as the release of political prisoners, freedom of association and speech, the abolition of censorship and respect towards believers and churches.³⁴ Soon after it was unofficially published, large numbers of people – including ordinary citizens – endorsed it and by November there were forty thousand signatories. This exposed the weakness of the late communist establishment and the popular hope for a better future with wider political representation, although only a few had a clear idea how the new system should be organised.

Fragmentation of late communist elites and the disintegration of the social consensus

Disagreements over basic goals were becoming increasingly apparent. Workers, experts, managers and party members were not afraid to voice their demands and implicit visions, though they were highly disparate. Workers' claims were predominantly linked to the branch and focused on productivity and differentiated rewards, disregarding both 'socialist democracy' and redistribution. Experts stressed the balance and efficiency of the 'economic mechanism', together with criticism of state tutelage. Managers were prepared to accept state supervision as long as it bestowed benefits on their companies. Nevertheless, they insisted on running enterprises without the requirement to be held to account for perceived failures or to be restricted by workers' councils. Communist political elites, previously used to observing and expecting both obedience and conformity and to hearing acclamatory statements and phrases, now faced the unbound articulation of concerns, experiences, visions and claims, reducing them to an impotent 'the party was not prepared theoretically for a public debate'.³⁵

The consequence of this fragmentation was an uncertainty about how to bring together different attitudes and aspirations. The old normative order and vocabulary seemed to be obsolete, but the new was yet to be created. For sure, there was common ground for coordinating all the statements and visions. But it remained only in outline – it was a kind of implicit normative background that was challenging the old hierarchies

and calling for a new social consensus. This was not the only reason for the collapse of Czechoslovak communism, but it did decisively determine the dynamics of the disintegration, and shaped the negotiation of the new hierarchies. Retrospectively, we can sketch its two major principles.

First, the very strong rhetoric of decisiveness, responsibility and independence of judgement, up to and including a critique of egalitarianism and collective passivity, slowly emasculated socialist vocabulary, which had hitherto assured the legitimacy of the existing hierarchies. Notions such as 'material interestedness' in production and the need to support 'innovations' and strengthen 'responsibility' were commonplace in public debates over the socialist economy. But replacing the term 'material interestedness' by 'incentive wages', intensifying the notion of 'responsibility' with 'decisiveness' and 'bearing consequences' beyond 'ministerial tutelage', and calling for independent projects removed from the scrutiny of state supervision, all these recastings were possible only against the background of a normativity that went beyond the vocabulary and hierarchies of 'real existing socialism'. These claims and intuitions were united in a vision of unrestrained personal decision-making and self-realisation. This ideal did not automatically delegitimise the practice of state socialism, and cannot be regarded as inherently anti-socialist ideologically, but in the context of all-embracing state supervision it had the specific effect of challenging the orthodox practice of state tutelage and redistribution. It also increasingly bolstered claims for the extension of civil rights, including the freedom of speech, assembly and confession.

This had, second, a powerful impact on the importance of planning practice and the concept of profit. The state plan was widely interpreted as something inappropriate in the context of rapid change and 'intensive development'. The central authorities were thus normatively subordinated to new standards: they were conceived as an architect, who should foresee and guarantee the framework, but leave room for 'deciding what, how and with whom' business is done in the enterprise.³⁶ This was what made the idea of the market so attractive: the concept was used not only as a descriptive tool to outline the 'local market' or 'world market', but acquired a new normative meaning, stabilising general rules of conduct and legitimising competition among participants.³⁷

These ideals, however, were almost never linked to a general vision of socialism. They were a peculiar outcrop of the previous, highly normalised and pragmatic, ideological rhetoric of the 1970s and early 1980s. Paradoxically, stringent forms of ideological discourse enabled reformist-inclined actors to gradually develop certain non-conformist attitudes – criticality towards official statements, appreciation of western goods – within existing practice, and still to see themselves as good socialist citizens because the expression of isolated specific differences did not represent the realm

of alleged 'extreme evil'.³⁸ Within *perestroika*-reformism, this pragmatic ideological model did not work, since the uniqueness of socialism – and its fundamental difference from any previous or existing system – was blurred. Socialist citizens were long accustomed to disregard the content of ideological speeches and to use ideologised vocabulary as a way of articulating their own experiences and claims, thus promoting the reproduction of social consent at a formalised level. *Perestroika* changed the vocabulary in part, replacing the notion of 'developed socialism' with new terms and ideas, but left the question of a general vision unresolved. The idea of the supremacy of socialism was not as yet completely destroyed. Nevertheless, it became a kind of vague indistinct concept and vision incapable of stimulating broad cooperation in everyday social and economic life. On the contrary, various disagreements and differing normativities inculcated doubt among wide layers of the bureaucratic and technocratic elites who began to question whether the existing socialist ideological model was able to articulate their needs and communicate them successfully. The reformism of *perestroika* can thus be regarded as an important factor in the decline of the communist project – not as *the* cause of the final collapse, but still a central precondition of the dissolution of the social consensus. Contention, becoming ever more visible, discouraged people from using a proactive socialist vocabulary.

1989: the demise

When Miloš Zeman, a popular figure of Czech economic forecasting, publicly attacked the communist hierarchy in August 1989, he used very strong words to criticise the existing state of affairs. He wrote openly about 'stagnation', the 'degeneration' of socialism, the 'failures' of the communist elite, its presumption of 'infallibility' and subsequent 'moral devastation' of society.³⁹ He was immediately dismissed from his post, although this fact did not prevent many people from illegally copying, distributing and discussing Zeman's text. Hardly anybody knew, however, how the transformation would be accomplished and what motive would come to the fore to overthrow the political establishment.

The flight of hundreds of East German citizens to West Germany via the Prague embassy of the Federal Republic in September and October 1989 was insufficient to mobilise the majority of Czechs and Slovaks against the regime.⁴⁰ Even though this exodus was spectacular, especially in Prague where people saw all the cars the East Germans had abandoned before going to the West German embassy, the Germans did not constitute in the eyes of the Czech and Slovak population the real 'community of the injured'. Despite the huge importance of the flight for German history, signifying as it did the beginning of the end for the East German

establishment and state, Czechs and Slovaks observed the situation rather passively, awaiting further developments.

If there was a uniting topic in the popular critique, it was the ridicule of an important speech by the general secretary of the communist party, Miloš Jakeš, in the summer of 1989. Soon after the address was broadcast on Radio Free Europe it was distributed on home-made records, spreading general scorn and derision towards party representatives. The rambling repetitive speech revealed that Jakeš was in many ways confused, mistaking basic things and words, distancing himself both from the West and the Soviet Union and displaying overall impotence:

Complicated processes are at work in the socialist states, and in our country. Very complicated processes! This is not a simple process, this *perestroika*! No! It is a process, I would say, that nobody fully understands, and a process which enemies can creep into – enemies that look like friends, for a certain time. That is why we should pay attention to questions, I mean ideological work, to clarify the nature of socialism, to clarify our way, our past, our present, not to allow its distortion – the presentation of our whole history as a chain of mistakes; we just have to build on the positive and go further and not repeat the errors. What we have done well ... we should do more of, and the things that we are facing, for which we have no method, force us to experiment, investigate, learn from others. And not just to copy everything, from A to Z, each one has his own conditions ... Yes, the Soviet Union is something completely different, it does not work, it is backward, Soviet villages are completely different from ours, our villages are highly cultural, similar to towns ... [We need] a different approach, and not always to copy everything.⁴¹

Yet this babbling was still not enough to mobilise the Czechs and Slovaks. Indeed, general ridicule had rather ambivalent effects: on the one hand, it clearly articulated the contempt in which the party leadership was held, but on the other, its comic element rather neutralised the critique of the regime.

Only the armed police intervention against the peaceful student demonstration on 17 November 1989 changed this situation.⁴² The date of 17 November was an official students' day – the manifestation of the socialist youth organisation (*Socialistický svaz mládeže* – Socialist Union of Youth) – but one which grew into an anti-regime demonstration and was then suppressed by the police corps. The contrast between the peaceful behaviour of the protesters and the cold violence of the security forces fuelled popular outrage and solidarity with the students. The subsequent mass demonstrations and general strike at the end of November and the resulting negotiations between communist and dissident representatives in December 1989 marked the demise of the old regime and the transition to a new democratic order.⁴³

Notes

- 1 For the Soviet context, especially the social and cultural preconditions of the collapse, see A. Brown, *Seven Years That Changed the World: Perestroika in Perspective* (Oxford, 2007); A. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, 2006).
- 2 M. Otáhal, *Opozice, moc, společnost: Příspěvek k dějinám normalizace* (Prague, 1994); R. Okey, *The Demise of Communist East Europe: 1989 in Context* (London, 2004), pp. 50–3.
- 3 ‘Zapis besedy General’nogo sekretaria TsK KPSS M. S. Gorbacheva s chlenom Prezidiuma TsK KPČ, Predsedatelem pravitelstva ČSSR L. Adamcem’, 2 November 1988, Gorbachev Fond, Moscow (no number). On Czechoslovak economic debates and reforms, see M. Myant, *The Czechoslovak Economy 1948–1988: The Battle for Economic Reform* (Cambridge, 1989).
- 4 The very word ‘reform’ remained taboo till the time of *perestroika*: recalling the ‘counter-revolutionary’ reforms of the 1960s, the Czechoslovak party elite was uncomfortable with the term ‘reform’ replacing it, both in official and expert vocabulary, with euphemisms and other notions, most often ‘improvement’ or set of ‘measures’.
- 5 *Ke zdokonalení plánovitého řízení národního hospodářství: sborník dokumentů a materiálů ke zdokonalení soustavy plánovitého hospodářství po r. 1980* (Prague, 1980). The attempts to reform the economy in 1980 followed the Soviet reforms of 1979. On Soviet discussions at the start of the 1980s, see P. Sutela, *Economic Thought and Economic Reform in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 95–129. On the Soviet economic reforms of 1979 and their total failure, see P. Hanson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy: An Economic History of the USSR from 1945* (London, 2003), pp. 146–9.
- 6 See Myant, *The Czechoslovak Economy*, pp. 209–13.
- 7 The concept of ‘intensification’ became the official party line only in the 1970s. In legitimising this notion, Czechoslovak experts usually cited (1) official party proclamations or quotations from party leaders; (2) Soviet exemplarity; (3) quotations from Marx; and (4) phrases such as the ‘productive development of Leninist principles’. With these underpinnings, it was possible to introduce certain critical notions such as the ‘low quality of capital assets’, their poor utilisation, high material cost of production and inefficient labour productivity. See J. Dvořák, *Intenzifikace ekonomiky a chozrasčot* (Prague, 1982).
- 8 ‘Effectiveness’ became an official keyword in the Soviet Union in the 1970s. Effectiveness was even labelled as the ‘highest element of our whole economic strategy’ and the tenth five-year plan (1976–80) was officially called a ‘five-year plan of effectiveness and quality’. See L. Brezhnev, *Leninskim kursom*, vol. 5 (Moscow, 1976), p. 498.

- 9 'Improvement' was also a way to avoid reformist vocabulary. Consequently, the official reform packages, as for instance that of 1979, had the title 'On the Further Improvement of the Economic Mechanism and Objectives of the Party and State Organs'. See 'O dalneishem sovershenstvovanii khoziaistvennogo mekhanizma i zadachakh partiinykh i gosudarstvennykh organov. Postanovlenie TsK KPSS ot 12 iulia 1979 goda' (Moscow, 1979).
- 10 S. White, *After Gorbachev* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 19–23.
- 11 S. Wolchik, *Czechoslovakia in Transition: Politics, Economics and Society* (London, 1991), pp. 245–6.
- 12 'Usnesení Ústředního výboru KSČ o komplexní přestavbě hospodářského mechanismu ČSSR a jejím zabezpečení', *Rudé právo*, 22 November 1987. See also *Dokumenty k přestavbě hospodářského mechanismu Československé socialistické republiky* (Prague, 1988), pp. 5–33.
- 13 'Usnesení vlády ČSSR ze dne 22. října 1987 o právním zabezpečení přestavby hospodářského mechanismu', in *Právní zabezpečení přestavby hospodářského mechanismu ČSSR* (Prague, 1988). See also P. Raban, *Státní podnik. Poslání, práva, povinnosti* (Prague, 1988), pp. 10–11.
- 14 For an overview and abstracts of the twenty most important legal regulations on *perestroika* in Czechoslovakia, see *Komplexní přestavba hospodářského mechanismu v rozhodujících právních normách* (Prague, 1989).
- 15 In the Soviet Union, the act on state enterprise was discussed in the spring of 1987 and approved in the middle of that year. Czechoslovak discussion took place in the summer of 1987 and the act was then implemented from the middle of 1988.
- 16 Z. Šulc, *Psáno incognito. Doba v zrcadle samizdatu, 1968–1989* (Prague, 2000), pp. 258–9.
- 17 L. Rusmich, 'Zbožně-peněžní vztahy', *Hospodářské noviny*, vol. 31, no. 19 (1987), p. 3. Z. Mošna, 'Zásady činnosti. K návrhu zákona o státním podniku', *Hospodářské noviny*, vol. 31, no. 30 (1987), p. 3.
- 18 V. Komárek, 'Ekonomika žádá revoluční změnu', *Hospodářské noviny*, vol. 31, no. 10 (1987), p. 8.
- 19 V. Šlajer, 'Úvahy k zamyšlení', *Hospodářské noviny*, vol. 31, no. 40 (1987), p. 6. Vratislav Šlajer was a member of the government Committee for the Planned Conduct of the National Economy.
- 20 For all the motives, see J. Leščišin, 'Neublížme dobrej věci', *Hospodářské noviny*, vol. 31, no. 32 (1987), p. 6; P. Skála, 'Sdružení podniků', *Hospodářské noviny*, vol. 31, no. 32 (1987), p. 6; J. Vrabec, 'Na čo fond rozvoja', *Hospodářské noviny*, vol. 31, no. 33 (1987), p. 6; J. Svoboda, 'Diskutabilní postavení ředitele', *Hospodářské noviny*, vol. 31, no. 34 (1987), p. 6; and M. Gregar, 'Povinnosti jako obligatorní', *Hospodářské noviny*, vol. 31, no. 36 (1987), p. 6.

- 21 M. Vondra, 'Problémů je dost', *Hospodářské noviny*, vol. 31, no. 34 (1987), p. 6.
- 22 J. Beřák, 'Pro zjednodušení řídících vztahů', *Hospodářské noviny*, vol. 31, no. 37 (1987), p. 6.
- 23 See 'Informace o výsledcích jednání národohospodářské komise ÚV KSČ dne 23. listopadu 1987', Národní archiv (National Archive of the Czech Republic – NA), KSČ-ÚV-10/8, fond KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – komise – národohospodářská komise ÚV KSČ, fascicle 7.
- 24 See 'Náměty a připomínky z jednání národohospodářské komise ÚV KSČ dne 23. 11. 1987', NA, KSČ-ÚV-10/8, fascicle 7.
- 25 'V ČKD Dukla nad návrhem zákona o státním podniku. Větší prostor aktivitě lidí', *Rudé právo*, no. 172, 25 July 1987, p. 1.
- 26 J. Nejdlá, 'Být prvním plamenem', *Kmen: literatura, teorie, kritika*, no. 28, 15 July 1987.
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- 28 J. Suk et al. (eds), *Hlasy občanské společnosti 1987–1989: Výběr z textů a dokumentů* (Prague, 1999), pp. 12–17.
- 29 For an overview of these critical themes, see M. Pullmann, *Konec experimentu: Přestavba a pád komunismu v Československu* (Prague, 2011).
- 30 The most detailed text is M. Otáhal, *Opoziční proudy v české společnosti 1969–1989* (Prague, 2011).
- 31 Otáhal, *Opoziční proudy*, pp. 328–510.
- 32 See J. Cuhra, 'Skrytý zápas. Stát, katolická církev a mládež v druhé dekádě normalizačního režimu', in M. Vaněk (ed.), *Ostrůvky svobody. Kulturní a společenské aktivity mladé generace v 80. letech v Československu* (Prague, 2002), pp. 107–43.
- 33 See 'Zapis osnovnogo soderzhaniia besedy M. S. Gorbacheva s M. Iakeshem', 18 April 1989, Gorbachev Fond (no number). The question of 'enemies of socialism' and attempts to change the official interpretation of 1968 took up about a quarter of the whole discussion between them – it was thus one of the most important issues for the Czechoslovak delegation.
- 34 Suk et al. (eds), *Hlasy občanské společnosti*, pp. 79–80.
- 35 'Část stranického aktivu nebyla teoreticky připravena pro veřejnou diskusi.' See 'Náměty a připomínky', NA, KSČ-ÚV-10/8, fascicle 7, p. 1, entry Kubeš.
- 36 Skála, 'Sdružení podniků', p. 6.
- 37 Some viewed the 'market' even as the core of *perestroika* activities. See Komárek, 'Ekonomika žádá', p. 8.
- 38 On the pragmatic model of Soviet ideology which corroded at the time of *perestroika*, see Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*.
- 39 M. Zeman, 'Prognostika a přestavba', *Technický magazín*, vol. 32, no. 8 (1989), pp. 6–9.

- 40 O. Tůma, 'Zusammenbruch zweier kommunistischer Regime', in D. Brandes, D. Kováč and J. Pešek (eds), *Wendepunkte in den Beziehungen zwischen Deutschen, Tschechen und Slowaken 1848–1989* (Essen, 2007), pp. 299–306.
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Discourse and power: the FSN and the mythologisation of the Romanian revolution

Kevin Adamson and Sergiu Florean

A revolution is a rush of life through a crack in the appearance of things. It roars forward; it staggers; it ambles. *It is no one's careful plan or, if so, only in retrospect.*¹

Introduction: a discursive approach

In the period since the Romanian revolution of December 1989, a significant body of scholarship has accumulated that seeks to identify the causes and consequences of the events within the broader context of the East European revolutions of 1989. The majority of accounts are based on one of the following approaches: (1) an evaluation of whether the Romanian events 'qualify' as a 'real' revolution;² (2) deductive establishment of the causes of the revolution based on a variety of assumptions about internal and external politics linked to the necessary and sufficient conditions for a revolution to occur;³ and (3) assessment of the consequences for democracy in Romania of the FSN's (National Salvation Front) takeover.⁴

The FSN emerged onto the Romanian political scene on the afternoon of 22 December, shortly after the flight of the despised communist leader Nicolae Ceauşescu from the capital city. It grouped together a number of high-profile dissidents under the leadership of Ion Iliescu and Petre Roman.⁵ Iliescu at least was a known figure in Romanian society before the revolution, having been a rising star prior to being publicly sidelined in 1971 by Ceauşescu.⁶ He had a reputation as a reformer and had come to be viewed as a supporter of Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* policies.⁷ Immediately following an announcement on Romanian television, the FSN moved to assume all state power and control over the army. It claimed to 'group together all of the healthy forces of society' and claimed as its goal 'the establishment of democracy, liberty and the dignity of the Romanian people.'⁸

Focusing on how the language and practice of the FSN shaped political events following the flight of Ceauşescu on 22 December 1989, this

study takes a different approach to those mentioned above by specifically examining the foundations of the FSN's takeover of power in the name of 'the Revolution'. These foundations lay in identifiable discursive strategies that drew a political equivalence between the 'revolution', 'the people' and the 'necessity of FSN rule'. In examining these strategies, the chapter sheds light on how the FSN sought legitimacy, forged symbolic power, mobilised support, produced consent and diminished opposition. In fact, the FSN carefully fashioned a new political legitimacy through the successful rearticulation of the popular uprising of 16–22 December into a narrative sequence that supported a political mythologisation of the Romanian revolution.⁹

The myth was based on three features. First, all negative articulations were focused on the former leader and his entourage, including members of his family and the *Securitate* (secret police), not 'communism' as such. Second, FSN discourse consciously placed the FSN on the side of 'the people' and 'the uprising'. Third, the FSN claimed to be the 'emanation' or political form that emerged from the uprising, while discussion of the manner and legitimacy of the FSN takeover of state power was avoided as much as possible. Thus, the main function of the narrative was to build a retrospective depiction of events since 22 December as a revolution that was in keeping with the spirit of the popular uprising, and to discursively produce and maintain an inextricable and positive link between two key signifiers: 'revolution' and 'FSN'. However, by the second half of January 1990 it was clear that the FSN narrative, and the legitimacy of the provisional government led by Iliescu and Roman, was coming under severe challenge from newly emerging political parties and movements. The most important among these were the PNT (Partidul Național Țărănesc – National Peasant Party), the PNL (Partidul Național Liberal – National Liberal Party) and PSD (Partidul Social Democrat – Social Democratic Party), henceforth becoming known as the 'historic parties', claiming as they did to be re-established inter-war parties. Other groups such as the Group for Social Dialogue and the Association of Former Political Detainees were formed also at the end of December and the beginning of January. In particular, following the announcement on 23 January that the FSN would contest the forthcoming elections, the 'historic parties' (PNT, PNL and PSD) criticised the manner in which the FSN had taken power and its decision to contest elections given the fact that the FSN was initially formed as a provisional government.¹⁰ Thereafter, accusations circulated that the revolution had been 'hijacked' or 'stolen' by a group of ex-communists around Iliescu and Roman.¹¹

In this chapter we show how the assumption and consolidation of power by the FSN and the army from 22 December onwards went hand in hand with the creation of a novel political frontier¹² that served to dramatically

polarise political identities in Romania from December 1989 through January 1990. During this period Romanians lived in a febrile political atmosphere. They were encouraged above all, by means of the emerging mythologisation of the revolution, to fear a restoration of the Ceaușescu order. This mythologisation was crafted by the leaders of the FSN and one of its principal elements was the demonisation of Ceaușescu and his wife Elena, and their association in the narrative of the time with, supposedly existing, cells of anti-revolutionary terrorists or *securitate*, necessitating the action of the army and the FSN to protect the public.

Another important element of the revolution narrative was the description of the FSN itself. The plans of the FSN to take power were made public on the afternoon of 22 December. From the outset, these plans were expressed clearly in terms of the necessity of FSN power in order to protect the 'people's revolution' by responding to the 'terrorist threat'. According to this part of the narrative, the people's uprising had given birth to a necessary political moment in the formation of the FSN as the agent of the revolutionary people. This was of course a direct call for the acquiescence of the public in the FSN takeover. The hinted at alternative would be a restoration of the Ceaușescus. Therefore, what is interesting is that the Romanian revolution did not result in a popular movement seizing power from the old regime (as in many accounts of how other revolutions happened), but in the appropriation of a popular uprising by a new political formation constituted *after* the flight of the dictator.¹³

Long-term consequences of 'Iliescu's Revolution' for the Romanian political system are still evident. The post-December 1989 Romanian party system still bears the scars of the revolutionary events, and Iliescu's takeover in 1989 and subsequent electoral victory in May 1990 still cast a long shadow over the political system.¹⁴ Of the four main parties that make up the current Romanian party system, two of them (PSD¹⁵ and PD-L¹⁶) are arguably direct descendents of the FSN, while one (PNL¹⁷) is directly associated with the opposition to the FSN in 1990. Even the moderate Hungarian minority UDMR/RMDSz party and its radical opponents draw on narratives of the Revolution to establish revolutionary legitimacy.¹⁸ The main party political result of the FSN narrative of the revolution has been the establishment of what some commentators have convincingly referred to as a communist/anti-communist cleavage in post-1989 Romanian politics.¹⁹

In the sections that follow we focus on three aspects of the FSN's revolutionary-discursive strategy in more detail. First, we analyse the portrayal of Ceaușescu that demonises him and his entourage as enemies of the Romanian people. The production of Ceaușescu as the principal symbol of popular enmity was central to the discursive strategy of Iliescu and the FSN to create popular unity. Second, we look at the attempt to

depict a symbiotic relationship between the people and the FSN, based on a common opposition to Ceaușescu. Third, we look at the construction of the FSN as a revolutionary agent, charged with the responsibility of creating a new regime that emanated from the popular uprising.

Constructing the political frontier: the demonisation of the Ceaușescus and the ‘terrorists’

The demonisation of the Ceaușescu couple continued in an organised form from 22 December through January 1990. The main thrust of the campaign was his connection to the *securitate* and the ‘terrorists’ who appeared to be engaged in counter-revolution from 22 December 1989 until 1 January 1990. In this section we look at some examples of how Ceaușescu was depicted in the Romanian mass media from 22 December and how these images contributed to the discursive strategies of the FSN. *Comunicatul către țară* (‘Communiqué to the Country’) was the first FSN statement that constituted ‘the revolution’ as part of a wider narrative that articulated the future after Ceaușescu. It was also the first statement to signal the new political frontier in Romanian politics by giving meaning to the FSN as the ‘grouping together’ of ‘all healthy forces’ opposed to the ‘Ceaușescu clan’ and ‘tyranny’.²⁰ Thereafter, the FSN would rely heavily on a negative portrayal of Ceaușescu himself. Moreover, the drama of the ‘terrorist’ threat that appeared contemporaneously with the establishment of the FSN temporarily drew attention away from the FSN’s speedy assumption of state power.

The fall of the odious dictatorship of the Ceaușescu clan added a final page to the bloody chronicle of years of suffering endured by the Romanian people. Elements ... remaining loyal to the tyrant tried to continue this terrorist practice of the old regime ... indiscriminately killing unarmed people. The Romanian people affirmed once again its immense moral energy and will to freedom. The Army did its duty, as did the majority of the staff of the Ministry of the Interior. The Revolution has triumphed.²¹

Not only FSN-controlled media at the time reported in this vein. A story in *România Liberă* on 23 December described the feelings of the masses for Ceaușescu. According to the paper, his last speech from the balcony of the Central Committee building had ‘boiled the blood in the veins of the demonstrators’.²² The image of Ceaușescu was used countless times in this way to depict the moment when the ‘people’s anger spilled over into revolution’.²³ This strategy quickly and convincingly constructed Ceaușescu as the principal problem, with the popular uprising propelling the FSN ‘together with the people and the army to eliminate him from power’.²⁴ So that the revolution could continue, and to stop the threat from

the terrorists, Iliescu claimed that it was necessary for 'all state power to be taken over by the FSN'.²⁵

Another example was Iliescu's call on the people to evacuate areas under attack from the 'terrorists': 'citizens in apartment blocks in dangerous zones where the terrorists are active, especially around the television station and the radio, we advise where possible to evacuate the buildings in order to make the work of our military units easier'.²⁶ Iliescu, appealing to 'the people' on 22 December, said:

Dear citizens! The process that has begun is irreversible, the *Securitate* practically no longer exists. The organs of the Interior Ministry are now subordinated to the army. We are making an appeal for your support and understanding for the following period of organisation. We will have some provisional structures that will assure the functioning of our society. We ask you to support the organs of public order in order to guard what is valuable to us, that which belongs to the people.²⁷

Press reports contrasted in stark terms the FSN, the army's and 'the people's' maintenance of the revolution and public order with the beastly 'terrorists', concentrating on the irrational and indiscriminate violence being carried out in the name of the Ceauşescu:

They shot into the apartments of peaceful people, resulting in many child victims. The children were playing at home, but the beasts were firing without the most basic judgment or reason. The first days of the children's holiday were stained with blood. During the days of the revolution, next to the army the youth and people of good faith were not frightened, they went out into the street to contribute to the victory that came at such a high price.²⁸

However, the methods used by the terrorists, it was claimed, did not stop at violence:

The resistance of some elements loyal to the odious dictatorship do not limit themselves to gunshots, fired from who knows which hiding place, but have turned to circulating rumours, attempts to poison the souls of the young people and to provoke vendettas and revenge.²⁹

The division is made clear between the murderous anti-popular and anti-revolutionary terrorists, and the people and the FSN-supporting army:

In front of the building of the Ministry of National Defence, passers-by, over a thousand people, watch by the light of day the hallucinogenic results of the fighting from last night. Here, a group of terrorists, heavily armed and cornered, attempted in their madness to storm the ministry building. They killed innocent people. They forcibly entered into people's apartments. They fired without pity. Now, their bodies, or at least what

remains of their bodies, can be found spread around on the concrete, torn apart by the bullets of the soldiers. From among the peaceful people, now an individual, with the movements of a cornered lizard, is attempting to escape. He's caught. And held down. Tied by a stocking to his right leg, there was found a loaded pistol. There was also a full round of bullets in his belt. There is only one just judgment for the criminals – that of the people.³⁰

These examples show how the FSN discourse clearly depicts a struggle for control of the streets and institutions between 'the people', the army and the FSN on the one hand, and the forces of 'the dictator', namely 'the terrorists' and the '*securitate*' on the other. At the same time, a picture of hope is offered that eventually the victory of 'the people' over the 'hydra' will be complete:

The shadows of the evening have fallen. Around the blocks of flats there is agitation. The inhabitants are beginning their rounds on the night guard against the infiltration of the terrorists. It is the fourth night of tension. In some places there can be heard gunshots. But it won't be much longer – the heads of the hydra are falling one after another. The final victory, peace, is so near.³¹

From the moment the Ceaușescu regime began to crumble, negative images of the leader were constructed and used as a means of separating the present from the past, and creating a specific mythological image of the salvation of the revolution.³² For example, a report in *Adevărul* on 31 December 1989 evoked the image of Ceaușescu thus:

No-one has of course forgotten, although it is not a pleasure for anyone to remember, how we used to begin our new year: on TV they announced with sombre tones that the miserable N. C. [Nicolae Ceaușescu], who for almost an hour syllabified the same stupid, insipid text, telling year on year the same lies and empty promises. This year the text mentioned was read in the same sombre atmosphere, only ten days earlier than usual – he always had a mania for fulfilling [things] before the deadline. Upon seeing his odious face, disfigured by fear, we all knew that now his moments were numbered, that his time had come.³³

Similarly, Roman depicted the monstrosity of the regime as emanating from Ceaușescu's personal construction of an apparatus of repression and terror: 'It is very difficult for you to imagine what a monstrous *apparatus*, equal to the monstrosities of his regime, that Nicolae Ceaușescu constructed in order to spy on and to terrorise this people, us', underlining the accusation of the personal nature of the regime and the locus of criminal responsibility.³⁴ Orha Petru, writing in *Adevărul* on 30 December, also characterised the former regime as a 'cruel dictatorship imposed by

the odious Ceaușescu family and by their numerous clan who were hungry for titles, power and the good life in our country'.³⁵

The demonisation of the Ceaușescus was arguably the most developed element of discourse in Romanian mass media during these days, a discourse that had powerful echoes in European media reports of the time.³⁶ As well as the brutality of the repression of the people, the depiction of the couple underlines the decadent luxury of their lifestyle in the context of the privations and misery suffered by the majority of Romanians. Fănuș Neagu, writing in *Adevărul* on 5 January 1990, reiterated the yawning gap between the life of the shameless ruling couple and the people, offering a 'revealing reportage on the unbridled luxury of the dictators' villas in Snagov':

We know ... that at Snagov there are no longer cockerels, they were all butchered on the orders of the *securitate*, so that they [the Ceaușescus] could rest until late in the day. The priest was not allowed to ring the church bells on Sunday except when the leaders of the people were far away.³⁷

Among the countless examples of stories concerning the character of the Ceaușescus and their connection to anti-revolutionary terrorists, it was 'the revolution' that emerged as the principal political discourse addressing all of the political and economic crises facing Romania. This also gave meaning to the demonisation. 'The revolution' was necessary because these crises were all attributable to Ceaușescu. His image contributed to the narrative of the revolution's sufficiency in dealing with all social problems through the elimination of Ceaușescu. His removal from power would lead to 'justice', 'freedom' and 'welfare'. This is corroborated by a reading of the articulations that interpellate 'the people' to identify with the revolution. The single most important goal seemed to be to get rid of Ceaușescu, even after he was excluded from power. The following quotation shows how Iliescu himself constructed the singular guilt of Ceaușescu in emotive terms:

The regime ... was responsible for the catastrophic socio-economic situation of the country and for the political tension and is in the final instance guilty of the hated crimes against the people. The principal guilty party is Ceaușescu. This man, without heart, soul, brain, without reason ... Because the mad clique of Ceaușescu pushed us into chaos and disorder. Our people must demonstrate maturity in these moments so that we can reorganise ourselves on a democratic basis.³⁸

Iliescu's speech above shows how some of the central elements of the revolution's mythologisation were linked from the beginning. Ceaușescu and his 'mad clique' were held responsible for 'catastrophe', 'chaos' and

‘disorder’. He was also deemed responsible for ‘crimes against the people’. To solve this situation required ‘order’, ‘maturity’ and a ‘Committee of National Salvation’. Part of the imposition of order was the execution of the Ceaușescu. There were five main areas in which Ceaușescu’s culpability was established, as reported on 26 December, the day after the execution of the couple. These were ‘genocide’ resulting in 60,000 victims, the organisation of armed action against the people by usurping the power of the state, the destruction of the national patrimony, undermining the national economy and attempting to flee the country in order to reach embezzled funds of more than \$1 billion stashed away in foreign bank accounts.³⁹

Silviu Brucan, a prominent and powerful figure in the FSN,⁴⁰ painted a picture of the communist feudal and absolutist monarchy, with Ceaușescu as the tyrant:

What sense did it have to talk about socialism, a socialist state, or a socialist republic in a country ruled by a type of absolutist monarchy, belonging, historically, to feudalism, and in which per capita GDP was and is three or four times smaller than in West European countries that are part of the capitalist system. In this context, only an uncultivated idiot like Nicolae Ceaușescu would dare to talk about communism as if it was just waiting around the corner, waiting only for us to hold out our hand to it!⁴¹

It was common at the time to portray Ceaușescu as an idiot absolutist leader, but sometimes also evil and cunning.⁴² It was held that he had to be tried not only for his criminal acts against the Romanian people over twenty-five years, but also for his attempt to suppress the will of the people during the revolution.

The demonisation of the Ceaușescus and the depiction of their attachment to murderous bands of *securitate* agents transformed into terrorists had a profound impact in terms of the transformation of the popular uprising. In effect, two simultaneous processes were unleashed by this discourse. First, the FSN and the armed forces could legitimately take power in the face of a threat from the forces of counter-revolution and repression of the people. Second, in terms of the political aspects of the revolution, the FSN became the dominant revolutionary agent, eclipsing the forms and embryonic organisation that had taken place during the popular uprising. In the following section, we examine more closely the means by which the FSN constructed a direct equivalence between its post-uprising organisation and ‘the people’ who had participated in resistance against the regime from 16 to 22 December.

FSN = the people: the people = FSN⁴³

We are living in a historic moment. The Ceaușescu clan, which brought the country to disaster, has been eliminated from power ... At this turning point we have decided to found the National Salvation Front, which is supported by the Romanian Army and which groups together all of the healthy forces of the country, irrespective of nationality, all those groupings and organisations who rose up with courage to defend liberty and dignity during the years of totalitarian tyranny.⁴⁴

The success of the FSN as actual revolutionary political authority as well as future political party can in large part be explained by how it managed and developed the association between itself and the events of 16–22 December 1989. In Iliescu's own words, the FSN was in fact an 'expression of the public will for the reconstruction and renewal of Romania'.⁴⁵ Media discussions of the revolution in the period from 22 December 1989 through to and after the elections in May 1990 continued to be dominated by the discourse of the FSN, who were the revolutionary government but now also established as a political party contesting the elections. This was possible due to the way in which the FSN assumed the responsibility for 'organising the transition' and 'ensuring the necessary calm' for the transfer of power from the revolutionary regime to new institutions following elections. If spontaneity and chaos had been the norm in the first days of the revolution, associated with the popular uprising and the flight of the Ceaușescus, after the creation of the FSN a new phase began associated with FSN calls for the renewal and salvation of society. The salvation of Romanian society, in the shape of Iliescu and the FSN, also required 'order' and 'stability'. The FSN appeared to be up to the task, organising the trial and execution of the Ceaușescus on 25 December 1989, and with the unconditional support of the army the 'terrorist attacks' decreased in frequency following this date and eventually faded in significance by the turn of the year.

The Army is articulated as a guarantor of the success of the revolution and an essential element of the fulfilment of a 'superb collective work',⁴⁶ and certainly enjoyed a very positive image (despite its earlier participation in repression of the popular uprising⁴⁷), being associated in the new discourse with the creation of the modern Romanian national state. From the first hours of its existence, the FSN clearly communicated its role as a catalysing agent around which forces in the fight against the ancien régime could coalesce. The army would be among the very first of these forces to be mentioned:

In the tumult of these days, in the course of which history has ceased to be made behind closed doors and great decisions have been taken by the people, engaged in an immense collective work, a great and wonderful institution

has proven itself to be long lasting and has affirmed itself as a vector of the national will – the Romanian Army. In the history of our people, the army has always played a decisive role in the defence of the values that define us as a state and as a nation, those of integrity, sovereignty and the independence of the country ... Our army, the embodiment of the country, did not lower itself to open fire on the youth, on women and children, or on all of those who wish to build a new era and a new condition for this country.⁴⁸

In fact, in the popular discourse of the time, carefully appropriated by the FSN, the possibility of the revolution successfully taking place was epitomised by one of the key slogans of the revolution, ‘armata e cu noi!’ (‘the army is with us!’).⁴⁹ ‘The Romanian Army could not have prioritised any order above that of THE GREAT PEOPLE from which it comes.’⁵⁰ This was because the army refused after 22 December to carry out the order to repress the demonstrations. Therefore, in the popular narrative the revolution was won the moment the army deserted Ceaușescu and became ‘the people’s army’. This slogan symbolised the power behind the revolution as a popular movement, before the appearance on the television screens of the FSN. The army in this sense was articulated as the symbol of the power of the people against tyranny. One of the most famous Romanian actors, Ion Caramitru, made the first announcement of ‘the revolution’ taking over the television, with the ‘help of the army’, on 22 December 1989, at around 2 pm. ‘Brothers, by the Grace of God, we are here in the studio of the Television. We succeeded in arriving here behind tanks, with the army, with the students and the people you see now, and with thousands and thousands of Romanians and other nationalities who brought us here.’ After several minutes the famous poet Mircea Dinescu spoke again to announce that ‘the army in Bucharest is with us.’⁵¹

This narrative, which made up a significant part of the mythologisation of the revolution, was relatively uncontentious and has largely remained so given the immediate co-optation of the army to the FSN provisional government. ‘At this moment, when we are at a crossroad, we decided to establish the National Salvation Front which relies on the Romanian army, and which groups together all healthy forces of the country’.⁵² This accorded a heroic role to ‘the people’ and ‘the army’ who risked their lives in demonstrating against the regime, and at the same time cemented the image of the army as the ‘people’s army’:

After long years of the accumulation of profound social tensions, a veritable explosion of discontent and popular anger obliged the dictator to flee. But he was no longer able to escape the inevitable punishment that he deserved. Unfortunately, this liberation was paid for by a painful blood tribute. The monstrous apparatus of repression, conceived of and organised in the

service of the dictator, opened fire on the demonstrators in Timișoara and afterwards, following the flight of the dictator, terrorist formations acted in the capital and in other towns with the aim of destabilising the new power – generated spontaneously by the mass movement – a power that had only just come into being. Moreover, any attempt by the remains of the old regime cannot turn back the wheels of history. The process that has taken place is irreversible. The popular revolution has triumphed and will remain triumphant. I would like to use this opportunity to pay a profound homage to all of those who made sacrifices for the cause of the revolution, to all of those who actively participated in the assault and overthrow of the dictatorship. Once again, I wish to repeat the respect which is owed to our army and the forces of the Ministry of the Interior, who remained faithful to the people and who defended the revolution.⁵³

While the FSN is presented as the formation that is ‘generated spontaneously’ from the Romanian revolution, at the same time it is claimed that it is the expression of a national consensus that followed the dramatic events of December 1989, a consensus expressed, according to Iliescu, by the support of ‘the people’ for the FSN, its platform and its leadership:

The most remarkable aspect of this revolutionary turning point is the wide consensus of the whole people, expressed by the widespread support for the platform of the FSN – the expression of the popular will for the reconstruction and renewal of Romania. As we enter the New Year, we wish to step into a new stage of the revolutionary process. While continuing to maintain vigilance against all those who would try to impede the process of the rebirth of the country, we must concentrate on the constructive objectives of the Revolution.⁵⁴

Making the equivalence between ‘the people’ and the FSN was one of the central aspects of the discourses created by Iliescu and his circle. In conditions in which it was claimed that the FSN is the ‘emanation of the Romanian revolution’, this discursive strategy proved immensely successful. Indeed, the FSN appropriated the slogans and symbolism of the uprisings in Timișoara and Bucharest and ultimately the strategy facilitated the transfer of power from the Ceaușescu regime to the FSN and demobilised and marginalised the popular uprising by means of its re-inscription as a necessary but already completed event within the new FSN narrative of the revolution. The FSN claimed to take over where the uprising left off:

The Romanian revolution was born from a national experience. From our pain ... Going out onto the streets with empty hands, confronting unarmed a bestial terror that had been unleashed, the youth of Romania opposed the dictatorship with the slogans from their heart ... They, the youth, the

workers, the soldiers, the students – the whole people – from the first day they put their fate in the hands of a National Salvation Front.⁵⁵

In fact, the FSN, initially presenting itself as a revolutionary movement, later became a political party in time to contest the elections in May 1990 that they organised. Initially the Front proclaimed a strictly revolutionary mission, that of overturning the old regime, acting as the provisional power and assuring a transition to democratic institutions. But rather than dissolve, Iliescu and Roman transformed the Front into a political party. One implication of this was that it was the only party in existence at that time that had successfully appropriated the name and the symbolism of the revolution:

The Front ... was born as a creation of our life, from our own experience. Its law is our life, our blood, our sweat, our needs. But the chain that links and sustains the revolutionary wave is not the people that make it up ... but the platform that the revolution itself elaborated, putting it into their hands. It is written with the blood of the revolution. It is the clean and coherent form of the slogans of the revolution. It is the expression of their ideas and their demands. They were shot at in the towns and the squares of Romanian martyrdom. From this, this platform, written with the blood of the martyrs, has created a national consensus. And, at the present time, the only political structure capable standing on their shoulders is the Front.⁵⁶

In the absence of any party capable of contesting the role of the FSN in the first days of the revolution after 22 December, as well as the role of Romanian Television as the bastion of the revolutionary leaders (now subordinated to the control of the Front), Iliescu's new political formation succeeded in building an exceptional political legitimacy during December, a legitimacy that remained largely uncontested until well into January 1990. The overwhelming victory of the Front and Iliescu at parliamentary and presidential elections in May 1990 demonstrated clearly the degree to which the equivalence between the people, the FSN and the revolution, that the Front had so carefully crafted, had been a success. From an exceptional and dramatic revolutionary moment, Iliescu, Roman and the FSN managed to successfully shape political identities in Romanian society after 1989, and unwittingly shaped the conflicts and controversies that would follow.

FSN as the political instrument of the revolution

The National Salvation Front, as a movement, was the result of the revolutionary process, it is the emanation of the popular revolution of 22 December. It assumed the political leadership of the revolution, and placed

itself at the front of the masses of the youth, workers, intellectuals, and together with the army it defeated the special forces of the securitate, of the terrorists, thus assuring the victory of the revolution. This reality obliges [the FSN] not to abandon the immense process of democratic reconstruction which it has put in motion. The Platform-programme elaborated by the Council of the Front has wide patriotic support. Assuming the great responsibility of ensuring the political leadership of the country in such a difficult and complicated period, the Front has engaged itself in the massive task of national salvation, and of improvement of the economy, social and political life, a complex and long lasting task.⁵⁷

The popular revolution against the tyranny of the Ceaușescu created an incontestable legitimacy for the National Salvation Front, which does not need either a party, or a new 'ism'. Ceaușescu's dictatorship was so complete in its repression of any dissidence or opposition, that the popular explosion that removed it from power did not have and could not have a political leadership. In fact, this leadership was forged in the fire of the revolution and thus the National Salvation Front was born.⁵⁸

The period from mid-January to May 1990, when the first free elections following the flight of Ceaușescu took place, was one in which serious political antagonisms developed over the very meaning of the revolution. What the FSN did achieve was the establishment of new national democratic institutions, and free elections to these institutions were held by May 1990. However, in the run up to the elections the FSN's appropriation of the revolution as a tool to forge its own legitimacy as the instrument of revolutionary popular sovereignty was called into question by an emerging opposition movement, grouped in particular around the PNL and PNT. ⁵⁹ When the FSN announced its intention to be both revolutionary sovereign and a political party for the purposes of contesting elections, the antagonism quickly became violent. In Bucharest, and in other towns in the country, the legitimacy of FSN authority was challenged. Demonstrators protested against the manner in which the FSN had taken over and had supposedly monopolised state power, against the lack of political reforms (despite the many reforms that had taken place) and against the supposed maintenance of the apparatus of repression associated with the communist system. Moreover, the opposition contested everything about the FSN itself, including the composition of its leadership and its territorial organisation, and the supposed marginalisation of the 'historic parties' from decision-making during the interim period until the May elections. The principal accusation against Iliescu and the FSN was that they were unfairly using their control of the mass media in order to consolidate their position as a future political party.⁶⁰ In the pages of *Adevărul*, the position of the emerging opposition parties, the PNT, PNL and PSD, was articulated thus in a joint declaration:

Through this decision [FSN contesting elections as a party], the FSN has lost its neutrality and its role as provisional government as well as its credibility vis-à-vis public opinion. How can there be talk of free elections and equitable conditions for all political formations when the FSN holds a monopoly on all the levers of the state in a completely totalitarian manner. The Front has discretionary access to funds and economic means, to television, radio and newspapers; the people are subject to biased information and disinformation.⁶¹

This raises an interesting point about the Romanian revolution. The one appropriated and articulated by Iliescu and the FSN may well have been an anti-Ceaușescu revolution. However, the hoped for revolution on the part of the anti-FSN demonstrators, who would eventually be ousted from Bucharest's Piața Universității (University Square) in June 1990, was certainly expressed as an anti-communist revolution. It is therefore not surprising that Iliescu and the FSN paid a great deal of attention to the articulation of their political theory linking the people, the popular uprising, the army and the FSN in one image of social and political symbiosis.

As far as the FSN was concerned, the revolution had been conducted by them and ended with the transfer of power to the Front, the execution of the Ceaușescu couple, and the fading into the background of the threat from terrorists and renegade elements of the *securitate*:

Only two weeks since the victory of the popular revolution, we must note that ... in the first days terrorist organisations, that sought to destabilise the country and to impede the establishment of a new authority, have been eliminated and liquidated. The widespread political effervescence, the activation of the population on all levels, and the active support expressed for the Platform of the National Salvation Front and for the reconstruction and renewal of the country, are a positive effect of the revolutionary process and a favourable premise for the future. It is important to ensure that there are people of moral authority, and who enjoy the trust of the citizens, within all of the organs of the Front. We must avoid the penetration of ... careerist and demagogic elements, who in moments of confusion ... attempt to worm their way into positions of authority. We are now passing into a new, especially difficult and complex phase, the constructive phase of the revolution.⁶²

Thus, the FSN's articulation of the theme of 'return to work' served to underline that the revolution had reached a new institutional and organised phase, monopolised by the Front, and also to delegitimise protesters as being irresponsible and idolent, who put the future of the country in peril:

The only force upon which we can rely, in order to overcome all of the difficulties that confront us, is the unity and cohesion of all around the

programme of improvement and development of the whole of the economic, political, social and spiritual life of society on a healthy basis. The FSN wishes nothing except to offer such a platform, open to all, irrespective of their political, ideological or religious options, without distinction of nationality, in the service of the common interest: to save the country and to ensure its future.⁶³

As a result, the FSN stood on a platform of national unity that claimed to exercise power in the interim period in the interest of the 'reconstruction of the country', not in order to help the development of political alternatives to the Front itself. Moreover, in the FSN's discourse the notion of 'youth' was an essential political category, comprising a homogeneous social body whose revolutionary *élan* had given the necessary boost to the overthrow of the perverse dictatorship and which, it was claimed, had to be a central component of the moves toward progress. The alternative depicted by the FSN was one in which a fragmented society with a cacophony of doctrinaire and dissenting voices, with different visions of the future, would lead to the failure of the revolution and at the same time of democracy itself:

We wish to remain free of preconceived ideas, of any party or ideological dogmas, to think and to elaborate solutions to all of the problems starting from the realities and necessities of society. From this vantage point, we appeal to all citizens to act in unity and strict cohesion. We trust in the active support of the youth, who were the soul and the shock troops of the revolution, and who, through their *élan* and creative potential, must become a force for the new and for progress in the whole of our society. We do not need factions, sectarianism and narrow party positions right now, but unity of thought and deed. Only thus will we overcome! We cannot fail! Our failure would give satisfaction to the supporters of the dictatorship, it would be the failure of democracy that would result.⁶⁴

Although the FSN accepted that it could not govern alone in the interim period until the May elections, eventually forming the more inclusive Provisional Council of National Unity (CPUN), the narrative constructed by the FSN concerning those who vehemently contested its legitimacy, such as the historical parties and those demonstrating against the FSN in Piața Universității, resulted in a political frontier that depicted anti-communist parties as anti-revolutionary forces. Yet another important aspect of this shifting political frontier was the changing character of the elements that now 'terrorised' the new power-as-emanation-of-the-revolution, even after the formation of the CPUN. Thus, following demonstrations by the anti-FSN groups in Piața Victoriei (Victory Square) in Bucharest on 18 February 1990, Iliescu declared that 'troublemaking elements are conducting violent actions against government buildings' and 'prejudicing the political life of the country.'⁶⁵

In an attempt to maintain the original political frontier so carefully crafted as a pillar of the FSN's revolutionary legitimacy, Iliescu invoked the Ceaușescu regime once again, following several weeks of violence between the government and demonstrators, in order to explain the conflict in Romania, if not between the political forces that contested the FSN's right to rule:

In the first place, I would call for calm. Romanians are temperamental, they are passionate about their ideas and their beliefs. But bad temper, vendettas, and even hatred ... do nothing for the country's economic, social and political stability. I think we still suffer from the 'Ceaușescu' syndrome. Lack of trust, suspicion, hatred ... It is an illness for which we need a cure.⁶⁶

Conclusion

In accounting for the *outcomes* of the events in Romania in 1989, we posed different questions than those that may be suggested by theorists of revolution in terms of regime instability and factors precipitating collapse. In the Romanian case, the collapse was certainly precipitated by a number of well-discussed factors, including a popular uprising, but an identifiable and coherent revolutionary agent did not actually emerge until after the tyrant had fled. In this chapter, we have not concentrated on the putative causes of the collapse, but rather on the specifically discursive features associated with the imposition of a new political order by the FSN from 22 December onwards. By means of a set of discursive strategies, the new state power of the FSN was articulated retrospectively as the key revolutionary agent. Its triumph in imposing this definition was linked to its maintenance of power, with Iliescu holding onto the presidency at elections in May 1990 and September 1992, and with his party also staying in government for more than six years. In November 1996, however, this run of electoral success came to a temporary end when Iliescu lost the parliamentary polls and was narrowly defeated by Emil Constantinescu in the second round of the presidential contest.⁶⁷

We claim that the Romanian revolution should be viewed as an object of discourse that encompassed the articulation of a moment of pure, if illusory and short-lived, popular sovereignty that gave way to a new hegemonic political order that succeeded in appropriating the symbols of the popular uprising that preceded it. In this sense, like many modern revolutions, three phases⁶⁸ can be distinguished in the course of events in Romania in December 1989 and January 1990. The first was the moment of challenge to existing authority, which appeared momentarily in Iași on 14 December and began in earnest in Timișoara on 16 December.⁶⁹ The second was the moment when that authority collapsed. For the Ceaușescu

regime this has been dated to the interruption of his speech in Bucharest on 21 December and the moment when the Ceaușescu couple fled from the crowd by helicopter from the roof of the Central Committee the next day at 12.06pm.⁷⁰ The third moment took place on the same day shortly after the flight of Ceaușescu when a new authority was constituted and successfully articulated its claim to power live on Romanian television in a declaration by Iliescu. The National Salvation Front, led by Iliescu, rearticulated the meaning of the discourses that emerged during the first two ‘moments’ mentioned above, and based their claim to legitimacy on the resulting mythologisation of the revolution. Commentators still tend to disagree sharply over events that took place *following* the flight of Ceaușescu just after midday on 22 December,⁷¹ a debate that has shaped the political divisions that emerged. This takeover relied on the successful deployment of several sources of symbolic power in order to impose meaning on the past and the future.

Notes

- 1 R. Armstrong and J. Shenk, *El Salvador: The Face of Revolution* (London, 1982), p. 72 (emphasis added).
- 2 For an excellent survey of these accounts, see R. Cesereanu, *Decembrie '89: Deconstrucția unei revoluții* (Iași, 2004).
- 3 See P. Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989* (Ithaca, 2005), pp. 9–52.
- 4 M. Rady, *Romania in Turmoil: A Contemporary History* (London, 1992); T. Gallagher, *Romania after Ceaușescu: The Politics of Intolerance* (Edinburgh, 1995); V. Tismaneanu, ‘The Quasi-Revolution and Its Discontents: Emerging Political Pluralism in Post-Ceaușescu Romania’, *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1993), pp. 309–48; K. Verdery and G. Kligman, ‘Romania after Ceaușescu: Post-Communist Communism?’, in I. Banac (ed.), *Eastern Europe in Revolution* (Ithaca, 1992), pp. 117–47.
- 5 Roman was Iliescu’s prime minister, a cultivated and photogenic polyglot and academic scientist, most likely chosen for his charisma and revolutionary credentials, having claimed to have participated in the popular uprising in Bucharest on 21 December, *before* the establishment of the FSN.
- 6 See N. Ceaușescu, *Expunere la Consfătuirea de lucru a activului de partid din domeniul ideologiei și al activității politice și cultural-educative, 9 iulie 1971* (Bucharest, 1971), p. 80.
- 7 For a discussion of this and related issues, see I. Iliescu (interviewed by V. Tismăneanu), *Communism, Post-Communism and Democracy: The Great Shock at the End of a Short Century* (Boulder, 2006), pp. 25–43.

- 8 For a chronological account, see D. C. Giurescu et al., *Istoria României în Date* (Bucharest, 2003), p. 744.
- 9 K. Adamson, 'The Construction of Romanian Social Democracy 1989–1996', in D. Howarth et al. (eds), *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 121–4.
- 10 Giurescu et al., *Istoria României în date*, p. 749.
- 11 Cesereanu, *Decembrie '89*, p. 7. Cesereanu lists at least 34 similar adjectives, such as 'confiscated', 'polluted' and 'recycled', that have been used ever since to describe the incomplete or false nature of the revolution.
- 12 See A. Norval, 'Trajectories of Future Research in Discourse Theory', in Howarth et al. (eds), *Discourse Theory*, pp. 219–22. Drawing on the work of Chantal Mouffe, Norval explains how a discourse aiming to produce 'unity' (such as that of the FSN) must define an enemy and establish a frontier to define the division between 'us' and 'them'.
- 13 See 'Comunicatul către țară', *România Liberă*, 23 December 1989.
- 14 Iliescu won 85 per cent of the votes in the presidential elections. The FSN won just under 67 per cent of the votes in the legislative elections on the same day. See P. Datculescu and K. Liepelt (eds), *Renașterea unei democrații: Alegerile din România de la 20 mai 1990* (Bucharest, 1991).
- 15 Partidul Social Democrat or Social Democratic Party, originally, FSN, then FDSN (*Frontul Democrat al Salvării Naționale*), then PDSR (*Partidul Democrației Sociale din România*), and finally PSD. See Adamson, 'The Construction of Romanian Social Democracy', p. 130, note 2.
- 16 At the time of the split in the FSN, Iliescu's faction became the FDSN, while Roman's faction kept the FSN acronym. Later, the party changed its name to *Partidul Democrat*, Democratic Party (PD), more recently becoming *Partidul Democrat – Liberal*, Democratic Party – Liberal (PD-L). See Adamson, 'The construction of Romanian social democracy', p. 130, note 2; also see the website of the PD-L, www.pdl.org.ro/index.php?page=PDL&textPag=14.
- 17 Gallagher, *Romania after Ceaușescu*, p. 82.
- 18 *Uniunea Democrată a Maghiarilor din România* (UDMR). This draws on the origins of the uprising at the Hungarian Calvinist church of pastor László Tőkés in Timișoara.
- 19 See J.-M. de Waele (ed.), *Partide politice și democrație în Europa centrală și de est* (Bucharest, 2003).
- 20 'Comunicatul către țară'.
- 21 From 'Comunicat al consiliului FSN', 24 December 1989, cited in I. Iliescu, *După 20 de ani: 1989 – an de cotitură în istoria națională și în viața internațională* (Bucharest, 2010), p. 264.
- 22 'Ceasuri de Speranță', *România Liberă*, 23 December 1989.
- 23 'Uriașa izbînda a poporului' in *România Liberă*, 23 December 1989.
- 24 'Comunicatul către țară'.

- 25 Ibid.
- 26 *Scînteia Poporului*, 24 December 1989.
- 27 Iliescu speaking on Romanian television, 22 December 1989, cited in *Revoluția Română în Direct* (Bucharest, 1990), pp. 84–5.
- 28 ‘Recviem pentru copii revoluției’, *Adevărul*, 26 December 1989.
- 29 ‘Demnitatea tinereții’, *Adevărul*, 28 December 1989.
- 30 ‘Vii și morți, ciracii ucigași’, *Adevărul*, 26 December 1989.
- 31 ‘În continuare, pe frontul luptei, pe frontul muncii’, *Adevărul*, 26 December 1989.
- 32 G. Adameșteanu, ‘Prefață’, in R. Girardet, *Mituri și Mitologii Politice* (Iași, 1997), p. vii; R. Cesereanu, *Decembrie ’89. Deconstrucția unei revoluții*, 2nd edn (Iași, 2009), pp. 195–6.
- 33 ‘La mulți ani, demnitate! La multi ani, democrație’, *Adevărul*, 31 December 1989.
- 34 ‘Cuvîntul rostit de primul-ministru Petre Roman’, *Adevărul*, 27 December 1989.
- 35 ‘Cuvîntul liber al cetățeanului liber’, *Adevărul*, 30 December 1989.
- 36 Siani-Davies discusses this in *The Romanian Revolution*, pp. 144–90.
- 37 Fănuș Neagu, *Adevărul*, 5 January 1990.
- 38 *Revoluția Română în Direct*, p. 86.
- 39 Information from ‘Comunicat’, *Adevărul*, 26 December 1989.
- 40 Brucan was a high profile member of the Communist Party and signatory to the Letter of the Six (*Scrisoarea celor șase*) criticising the regime, expelled from the party in 1988. For a discussion of the significance of the letter of protest, see K. Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu’s Romania* (Berkeley, 1991).
- 41 S. Brucan, ‘Fără isme, și fără partid’, *România Liberă*, 31 December 1989.
- 42 ‘Pentru luptătorii baricadelor capitalei’, *Adevărul*, 28 December 1989; ‘Alături, cu inima și sufletul’, *Adevărul*, 30 December 1989; see also *Revoluția Română în Direct*.
- 43 Iliescu, in an interview with the BBC’s John Simpson, mentions the Portuguese revolution of 1974 in positive terms. It is worth noting that one of the main slogans of the Armed Forces Movement during that revolution was ‘MFA = Povo; Povo = MFA’ (MFA – Armed Forces Movement, Povo – People). See *Simpson’s World*, BBC News Channel, broadcast 20.30 on Thursday 24 December 2009.
- 44 ‘Comunicatul către țară’.
- 45 I. Iliescu, ‘Discurs de an nou’, *Adevărul*, 4 January 1990.
- 46 I. Pavelescu, ‘Armata va fi întotdeauna cu noi!’, *România Liberă*, 23 December 1989.
- 47 For eyewitness accounts of the army’s participation in repression in Timisoara, see M. Milin, *Timișoara 15–21 decembrie ’89* (Timișoara, 1990).

- 48 I. Pavelescu, 'Armata va fi întotdeauna cu noi!', *România Liberă*, 23 December 1989.
- 49 For an account of some of the slogans of the popular uprising in Timișoara, see M. Milin, *Timișoara în Revoluție și După* (Timișoara, 1997).
- 50 'Armata e cu noi!' ('The army is with us!'), *Adevărul*, 4 January 1990; see also 'Armata va fi întotdeauna cu noi!' ('The army will always be with us!'), *România Liberă*, 23 December 1989.
- 51 See *Revoluția Română în Direct*, p. 21.
- 52 See 'Comunicatul către țară'.
- 53 Iliescu, 'Discurs de an nou'.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 'Revoluția și consensul', *Adevărul*, 26 January 1989.
- 56 'Revoluția și consensul'.
- 57 I. Iliescu, 'Comunicat din partea Consiliului FSN: 20 mai – Alegerile', *Adevărul*, 24 January 1990.
- 58 Brucan, 'Fără isme și fără partid'.
- 59 D. Pavel and I. Hossu, *Nu putem reuși decât împreună: O istorie analitică a Convenției Democratice, 1989–2000* (Iasi, 2003).
- 60 Gallagher, *Romania After Ceaușescu*, pp. 81–2.
- 61 'După anunțarea hotărârii Frontului Salvării Naționale de a participa la alegeri: Poziții ale unor partide', *Adevărul*, 26 January 1990.
- 62 I. Iliescu, 'Revoluția înseamnă, acum, muncă', radio and TV discourse, 7 January, published in *Adevărul*, 9 January 1990.
- 63 Iliescu, 'Revoluția înseamnă, acum, muncă'.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 I. Iliescu, 'Prejudicii aduse vieții noastre politice', declaration of 19 February, published in *România Liberă*, 20 February 1990.
- 66 I. Iliescu, 'Invitație la calm', *România liberă*, 27 February 1990.
- 67 Giurescu et al., *Istoria României în date*, pp. 752, 762 and 774.
- 68 C. Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution*, revised ed. (New York, 1965); see also T. L. Knutsen and J. L. Bailey, 'Over the Hill? The Anatomy of Revolution at Fifty', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 26, no. 4 (1989), pp. 421–31.
- 69 Giurescu et al., *Istoria României în date*, pp. 739–40.
- 70 Giurescu et al., *Istoria României în date*, pp. 742–4.
- 71 Cesereanu, *Decembrie '89*.

A revolution in two stages: the curiosity of the Bulgarian case

Elena Simeonova

The Bulgarian revolution, as a fundamental change of the political, social and economic order, occurred in two stages. The first (November 1989 to July 1991) was marked by an overhaul of the political system. The second (December 1996 to February 1997) cleared the way for the restructuring of the economy and state social provision. The period between the two stages was characterised by economic breakdown and permanent political and social instability caused by institutional inefficiency, frequent governmental turnover (in the period 1990–97 seven governments succeeded in office), ever-shifting parliamentary majorities, the dominance of non-parliamentary over parliamentary means of political competition and concomitant high levels of public discontent and protest. The overall outcome was the postponement of necessary structural reform and a slowdown in Bulgarian political and economic performance in comparison to other post-communist countries. For example, in 2011 Bulgaria was still the poorest country in the EU with an average monthly salary of 347 euros (689 *leva*).¹ This chapter will explore the peculiarities of the Bulgarian experience of 1989 and of the painful transition from communism to pluralism using this model of a two-stage revolution. It will conclude by examining why Bulgarians today regard the events of 1996–97, rather than those of November 1989, as marking the real turning point in their nation's path to democracy.

The revolution of 1989–91

Background

The democratic changes in Bulgaria had their origins in the development of several inter-locking preconditions: (1) the harsh economic problems faced by the country in the 1980s; (2) the persecution of the Turkish minority; (3) the confrontation between Gorbachev's *perestroika* (reconstruction)

and Todor Zhivkov's 'reorganisation'; and (4) the birth of the organised opposition in 1988.

Economic problems

On coming to power in 1985, Gorbachev introduced a form of *perestroika* in the Soviet Union, but the Kremlin failed to foresee the economic problems engendered by this transformation. The new approach affected Bulgaria – the 'spoiled child' of the USSR – most painfully. Previously the country had benefited from Soviet economic assistance. For example, Bulgaria profited from the remaking and re-export of cheap Soviet petrol on the world market: in the years 1981–83 Sofia earned more than \$2.2 billion from this activity.² Another privilege was the subsidy of 400 million roubles for agricultural production, which Zhivkov had obtained from Brezhnev in 1973. However, from his initial meeting with Zhivkov on 24 October 1985 Gorbachev was insistent that 'economic relations between the two countries must be put on an equal basis', whereupon Moscow suspended the agricultural subsidy and substantially reduced energy supplies.³ This was a real shock for Bulgaria and aggravated its poor economic situation. The country experienced serious energy problems and electricity cuts were introduced in the big cities. The ensuing dark, cold nights played a significant role in the demoralisation of society and drained confidence in the system, which after forty years of socialism had failed to ensure a normal life for its people.

The energy shortages matched the deteriorating state of agriculture, the main problem of which was over-centralisation in so-called 'agrarian-industrial complexes'. Additionally, in 1985 Bulgaria suffered a particularly severe winter followed by the harshest drought in the twentieth century. The impending economic crisis was made even worse in August 1986 when Gorbachev attempted to implement market mechanisms in the established system of the Council for Mutual Economic Aid (COMECON) whereby member states had received Soviet raw materials and in return supplied finished products regardless of quality.

The persecution of the Turkish minority

In December 1984 the regime introduced compulsory name changes of Bulgarian Turks. In part this step was motivated by the demographic issues the country had been facing since the late 1960s – the higher birth-rate of the Roma and Turkish minorities. In the period December 1984 to May 1985 the names of 850,000 Bulgarian Turks (10 per cent of the total population) were changed by law. Not surprisingly, this provoked an active response. The Bulgarian Turks set up their own illegal structure, the 'Turkish National Liberation Movement in Bulgaria' headed by the philosopher Medi Doganov. This organisation undertook various activities

including propaganda campaigns, political and economic sabotage, even terrorist attacks, the most serious of which were bombs placed at the train station in Plovdiv and at Varna airport, as well as on the mothers' and children's railway carriage on the Burgas–Sofia line.⁴

At the beginning of 1989, encouraged by the actions of the newly born movements of dissident intellectuals, the Bulgarian Turks expressed their discontent with the forcible name changes undertaken four years earlier. They organised mass demonstrations and although these were violently suppressed at the cost of many victims, the regime was compelled to search for a new approach to the 'Turkish question'. Based on a resolution of the Human Dimension Conference at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the authorities began to issue foreign passports to the Bulgarian Turks. On 29 May 1989, Zhivkov delivered a speech live on national television and radio, in which he underlined the Bulgarian origins of the Turks, but also gave them the right 'to choose their motherland and to leave Bulgaria temporarily or permanently'.⁵ This concession was a signal for the mass emigration of around 300,000 Bulgarian Turks – the so-called 'big excursion' – in the summer of 1989. The authorities were caught off-guard by the huge scale of the emigration and the country faced major problems with the harvest and maintenance of production. Moreover, the agricultural regions in North-Eastern and Southern Bulgaria were depopulated and Turkey was unprepared to receive and accommodate so many people.

The 'big excursion' was an attempt to preserve the regime through the exploitation of nationalism. But it struck Bulgaria hard, destabilising the economy, damaging relations with Turkey and widely discrediting the reputation of the country, particularly with regard to its record on human rights. Thereafter, Bulgaria became known as an 'intolerant and repressive state', especially in the Islamic world.

The confrontation between Gorbachev's perestroika and Zhivkov's 'reorganisation'

The direct confrontation between Zhivkov and Gorbachev began in 1987 after the January Central Committee Plenum of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) cleared the way for political reforms, and in particular greater internal party democracy, to match the economic restructuring already under way. However, it is important to emphasise that the personal conflict between Zhivkov and Gorbachev did not mean a general cooling off in Soviet–Bulgarian contacts. On the contrary, with the beginning of *glasnost* (openness) and the gradual erosion of censorship, subscriptions to Soviet newspapers and magazines in Bulgaria increased considerably. Bulgarian intellectuals now experienced the satisfaction of finding evidence for their doubts about the 'historic

and economic advantages of the political system of socialism' in Soviet publications.⁶

Before the middle of 1987 Zhivkov expressed verbal support for Soviet-style *perestroika*, but after realising that there was no chance of winning over Gorbachev he moved onto the attack. On the one hand, Zhivkov intensified contacts with the West as a means of resolving the economic problems of the country. Attention was focused on the Federal Republic of Germany and Japan, but new openings also developed in totally unexpected directions, for example with Israel.⁷ On the other hand, Zhivkov now opposed Gorbachev's *perestroika*, instead offering his own large-scale reform programme which he set out in the so-called 'July Conception'. This programme stipulated the political reorganisation of society, 'preparation for limited political and economic pluralism' and the necessity of drafting a new constitution.⁸ These changes were more profound than anything proposed at the time by Gorbachev and that is why he directly accused Zhivkov of 'an attempt to get round him from the left'.⁹

The implementation of Zhivkov's reorganisation programme started in August 1987 with a number of laws enacted by the National Assembly. Several ministries (education, finance, trade and people's health) were reorganised into superstructures, 28 counties were regrouped into nine districts and a special commission for drafting a new constitution was convened. But all these reorganisations brought additional disorder into government. One of Zhivkov's closest collaborators testifies:

The entire public energy was directed to 'mergers' and 'openings' of ministries and departments. If the economy had been stable, this could have been associated with a search for innovation. But the reorganisation of 1987 aggravated the economic problems and badly affected the central planning agencies and the financial system of the state. The decisions for this reorganisation were made in top secret in Evksinograd [a palace of the former Bulgarian royal family used as a summer resort house by the high level communist party *nomenklatura*]. They were approved by the Politburo and announced by decree.¹⁰

The July Conception brought Zhivkov and Gorbachev into direct confrontation. At a meeting in the Kremlin on 16 October 1987, the latter criticised 'the speed with which Zhivkov wants to make democratic reforms in Bulgaria'. But his real concern, according to Zhivkov, was that the communist party 'would no longer be a major centre of power'.¹¹ The principle of the leading role of the communist party was a cornerstone of Leninist theory and hence in 1987 Zhivkov's idea sounded like heresy to the Secretary General of the CPSU.

The intention of replacing the economic model of socialism with a market oriented system, postulated in the July Conception, did not remain

confined to paper. The main reason for decisive action was the negative economic trend. As Zhivkov acknowledged: 'We have lost the competition with capitalism'.¹² The liberalisation of the economic sphere started with the 'Decree for the restructuring of the Bulgarian economy', adopted in January 1989, which cleared the way for private economic activity and the tense situation during the summer months of that year did little to curtail Zhivkov's determination to avert the break-up of the regime by means of thorough-going reorganisation. At a prolonged session of the Politburo, held on 25 and 28 August 1989, it was decided to:

- 1 change the constitution taking into account the 'necessity for political pluralism, ownership transformation and the protection of civil rights';
- 2 change the statute of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP), introducing the principle of regular, multi-candidate elections for office in order to eliminate the possibility of permanent dictatorship by a self-selecting ruling elite;
- 3 enact a draft law for the health care system overseeing the end of free care, the reorganisation of medical help with the stress on family doctors and the establishment of health insurance funds.¹³

The law on health care reform was eventually published two days before Zhivkov's removal from power, the paradox being that it was subsequently delayed for nine years, being introduced only after the second stage of the revolution in 1996–97.

The birth of the organised opposition in 1988

An organised opposition in Bulgaria emerged only in 1988, when Soviet *perestroika* entered its radical *glasnost* phase. This does not mean, however, that before then there were no opponents of the communist regime in Bulgaria. Rather, they preferred not to express their convictions publicly or to leave the country and join the various émigré organisations. The first Bulgarian dissident movements – the 'Independent Society for the Protection of Human Rights', the 'Committee for the Protection of Religious Rights, Freedom of Conscience and Religious Values' and the independent trade union *Podkrepa* – did not gain much popularity and were peripheral until 1990. The main reasons for this marginality are that they were founded by relatively unknown figures, who had returned from abroad; they had few members, the majority being ex-political prisoners; and their activities were orientated outside the country toward foreign embassies, international organisations and western radio stations.

The impetus for the establishment of more active dissident organisations was the ecological concerns of Bulgarian intellectuals. A number of well-known intellectuals founded the 'Public Committee for the Ecological

Protection of Russe', a town situated on the banks of the Danube which had been permanently polluted by chlorine emissions from the chemical plant situated on the opposite side of the river, in Romania. Although the initiatives of the committee received strong public support, the first real political challenge to the regime came from the 'Club for the Support of Glasnost and Reorganisation in Bulgaria' established at the end of 1988. It is noteworthy that all the founders of the club were long-term members of the BCP and its programmatic declaration was highly ambitious covering the entire spectrum of existing social problems – economic conditions, human rights and civic freedoms, demographic issues and ecological concerns. During 1989 intellectuals opposed the regime on a mass scale as evidenced by the congresses of the unions of writers, painters, artists and journalists at which prominent figures sharply criticised regime policy and rejected the leadership candidates nominated by the BCP.

Course of events, November 1989–July 1991

The signal for political change at the top was given on 24 October 1989 by an open letter penned by minister of foreign affairs, Petar Mladenov. It was addressed to the BCP leadership, but was rapidly disseminated to the wider public. Mladenov accused Zhivkov of 'leading the country into a deep economic, financial and political crisis' and of 'isolating Bulgaria from the world ... even from the USSR'.¹⁴ The anti-Zhivkov faction in the party hierarchy united communists from different generations and points of view, but the main component were those who maintained direct contacts with the Soviet leadership – Mladenov, Andrei Lukanov (first vice-chairman of the Council of State) and others. Thus, it can be said that the 'Soviet factor' was crucial for the outcome of events. Scandalous disclosures about the interference of Soviet intelligence and the role of Lukanov can be found in the memoirs of the former Soviet diplomat in Bulgaria, Nikita Tolubeev. According to him, 'Soviet diplomats and KGB representatives took an active part in Zhivkov's removal from power.'¹⁵

At the Politburo session on 9 November 1989, which had to prepare the plenum of the Central Committee for the next day, the majority forced Zhivkov to hand in his resignation as General Secretary of the BCP and chairman of the state department. The plotters' fear that the army might intervene proved unfounded as the minister of defence, Dobri Djurov, took their side. No one defended Zhivkov. The policies pursued by the new leadership began moderately – Zhivkov was praised for his achievements in office, a personal pension was granted to him, and he preserved some other privileges like his country house. All this lends credence to those observers who describe the first step of the regime change as a 'palace coup d'état', a point discussed in more detail by Nikolai Vukov in his contribution to this volume.

The announcement of Zhivkov's removal from power gave rise to widespread joy, especially among oppositionists who were genuinely astonished by his downfall. In contrast to non-conformist intellectuals and human rights' campaigners in other East European countries, Bulgarian dissidents were more observers than participants in the beginning of the transition.¹⁶ Only on 7 December 1989 was the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) founded, uniting thirteen opposition organisations. Zheliu Zhelev was elected its first leader.

The days between 10 November and the end of the year were crucial for the future direction of the 'revolution'. Two major political tendencies emerged. One was oriented toward *perestroika* and aimed for moderate evolutionary improvement of the socialist system, introducing elements of democracy and the market economy. The other stood for rapid and radical reform directed at a fundamental change in the system. It corresponded to the common aspirations of society and the contemporary processes in Eastern Europe, but was rather weak, because the nascent opposition did not have sufficient experience. It endeavoured to follow the example of the more seasoned opposition movements in other countries, particularly Poland, and a 'Round Table' forum, based on the Polish model, was established on 3 January 1990 with the task of negotiating the transition between the opposition and the ruling elite. In the next few months it became the most important governing body. Although the National Assembly continued to be the major legislative institution, it, together with the government, accepted the decisions and laws negotiated at the 'Round Table'. It became a turning point in the political process and allowed the new political leaders of the opposition to gain in public stature and popular trust.

The 14th extraordinary congress of the BCP was convened between 30 January and 2 February 1990. It adopted a 'Manifesto of Democratic Socialism', by which the BCP rejected the Soviet model of socialism and accepted the social democratic alternative. The main power positions were shared out among the anti-Zhivkov proponents of reform: Petar Mladenov was nominated head of state, Andrei Lukanov was appointed prime minister and Alexander Lilov was elected party leader. Congress also approved an internal referendum of party members on the proposal to change the party's name from communist to socialist, a move which was ratified in April 1990. Soon after the congress, Lukanov tried to form a broad coalition government, but without any success. Even the docile Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BZNS), which for forty years had obediently followed BCP directives, refused to take part in the proposed government. Thus, in early February 1990 for the first time a purely communist government was formed, because none of the other parties wanted to collaborate with the BCP. However, it should be noted that at

this point the BCP was the only organisation capable of governing the country, and this made it an irrevocable part of the transition.¹⁷

The Bulgarian 'Round Table' ended with several political agreements: (1) the dismantlement of the socialist political system; (2) the transition to parliamentary democracy; (3) the removal of ideological stipulations from the constitution; (4) the elimination of all communist party structures in workplaces; (5) the eradication of direct communist influence over state institutions, particularly the army, the police, the judiciary and the diplomatic corps; (6) the abolition of the political police. The most important decision, however, was to hold elections for a revamped Grand National Assembly in June 1990. Bulgaria was the only country in Eastern Europe to link its first democratic elections with the elaboration of a new constitution. Bearing in mind the slowdown in economic and political reform compared to other transitional countries, the Bulgarian opposition attempted to accelerate democratisation by changing the constitutional system. But in the event, Bulgaria also became the only ex-communist country where the communist party (renamed the Bulgarian Socialist Party or BSP) won the first democratic elections and gained an absolute majority in the Grand National Assembly with 211 seats out of 400. The main opposition party, the UDF, took 144 seats, the BZNS won 16 and the Movement for Rights and Freedom (MRF), which represented the interests of the Bulgarian Turks, captured 23. These results evoked great surprise and discontent. The UDF leadership, especially, did not expect such a defeat and were unprepared for it.

There are several explanations for the outcome of the June poll. First, the timing did not suit the opposition, who wanted to postpone the elections until the autumn of 1990 in order to have more time to create local structures and prepare itself ideologically and organisationally. The ruling socialist party preferred earlier elections in the spring so as to take advantage of its high popularity after Zhivkov's removal from power. A compromise was set for June 1990. Second, the lack of political experience on the part of the opposition meant that it did not take into account the different, more positive attitude of Bulgarians toward socialism and the Soviet Union. In contrast to other countries in transition, left-wing and pro-communist ideas had had a strong influence over the country even before 1944 and Russophile feelings went back a long way to at least the national revival of the nineteenth century. Bulgarians had also not experienced at first hand the direct crushing of their national or democratic aspirations by Soviet military force, as had occurred in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. Against this background, many opposition candidates failed to attract mass popular support. Third, the negative electoral campaign of the opposition, notably that of the UDF, staked everything on the complete negation of BCP rule and Soviet influence in

all spheres of the economy and politics. Great emphasis was placed on the repressions of the communist era and the main slogans were '45 years are enough' and 'The time is ours'. In contrast, the BSP focused on the social gains made under socialism. It also denied the repressive past and promised a new 'democratic' socialism. Its slogan was 'Good luck for Bulgaria'. The negative electoral campaign of the opposition, based on the western model, was not to the Bulgarian people's taste.

Instead of resolving the problem of political legitimacy and calming down passions, the first democratic elections led to greater political and social confrontation. The UDF launched a campaign of civil disobedience and most universities in the country gradually joined the student strike initiated by the occupation of Sofia University, Saint Kliment Ohridski. The students protested against violations of the electoral law, although the polls were recognised as fair by foreign observers. The strike was joined by UDF supporters who blocked traffic on several streets in the capital and erected barricades. A so-called 'city of truth' was set up in the park between parliament and Sofia University and parents and teachers started a relay hunger strike. The chief demand by then was for the resignation of president Mladenov, who had suggested deploying tanks against the first big demonstration on 18 December 1989. He was eventually forced to resign on 6 July and the student strike ended a day later.

The UDF experienced its first successful bid for power when the Grand National Assembly voted to elect a new head of state on 1 August 1990. A compromise was reached and Zhelev, the former dissident and UDF chairman, was elected president. The figure that both the UDF and BSP agreed to entrust with forming the new government was Andrei Lukanov, who was the incumbent prime minister and BSP leader. Both of the major political parties clearly realised that the government had to implement extremely unpopular measures that would cause a drastic fall in the population's standard of living. In this sense the leaders of the UDF decided that the BSP should be left to form a cabinet and thus potentially lose significant public support. By this time internal discord within the UDF and BSP had also intensified.

Up to the late summer of 1990 the government had avoided any unpopular steps whatsoever, but the economic situation in the country continued to deteriorate. The financial resources of the state were limited and access to international monetary markets was cut off with the declared moratorium on foreign debt payments. Meanwhile, economic relations with the countries of Eastern Europe were breaking down. The political and economic deadlock engendered a new crisis in November 1990. Students in Sofia reoccupied the main university building and announced a national strike. The *Podkrepa* trade union backed the strike and a series of national UDF public meetings took place on 16–18 November under the

motto: 'No to the government's criminal inactivity; yes to an immediate change of the system.' On the evening of 29 November the political powers agreed on the need for a 'new national government of peaceful transition to democracy'. The socialist prime minister Lukanov resigned. The crisis was brought to an end on 7 December 1990 when, following a proposal by the president, the Grand National Assembly appointed the non-party lawyer Dimitar Popov to form a new government. The BSP and UDF each had a vice prime minister; the ministry of the economy and the ministry of finance went to the UDF while the BSP was in charge of the ministries of defence, transport and foreign economic relations.

In mid-April 1991 the draft constitution of the republic was submitted to the Grand National Assembly. The same day a UDF rally demanded elections for June. The student movements once again proved the 'most active pressure instrument'.¹⁸ Internal conflicts in parliament continued on many different levels, but the principal controversy now was support for or opposition to the new constitution. The beginning of the split in the UDF came in May when thirty-nine UDF MPs left parliament claiming that with a BSP majority the Grand National Assembly was incapable of drafting a democratic constitution. On 10 July 1991 a public meeting organised by the UDF at Alexander Batenberg Square in Sofia demanded a referendum to endorse the new constitution by a qualified majority. In protest against the requirement to take a new oath, twenty-three MPs started a hunger strike in the park next to Saint Sofia Church. As a token of solidarity, hundreds of residents supported those on hunger strike. On 12 July the Grand National Assembly passed the new constitution law by 309 votes and at the same time decided to dissolve itself and continue its work as an ordinary national assembly until the elections.

The adoption of the new constitution ended the first stage of the democratic revolution in Bulgaria and signified the main change in the political system, but nothing had been done about economic reform. The prime reasons for this were the perpetual conflict between the major political forces and the unwillingness of successive governments to introduce economic reforms because of their high social price.

Outcomes

The UDF narrowly won the new parliamentary elections on 13 October 1991 with 34.6 per cent of the national vote. The BSP received 33.14 per cent and the MRF 7.55 per cent. The poll results placed the UDF in a situation where it had to seek a coalition with the MRF, whose leaders, however, declared that they did not want any ministerial positions but would back a UDF government headed by Filip Dimitrov. The presidential elections at the start of 1992 showed how deeply divided the country was and resulted in an extremely fragile victory for the incumbent UDF

candidate Zhelev. Conflict unfolded both in the UDF parliamentary group and inside the government itself. The focal point of opposition between the UDF and BSP was the issue of restitution and ownership. The UDF's aspiration to create a new class of property owners clashed with public opinion which tended to identify with the state, but not with a state that was now selling off vast assets in which billions of dollars of taxpayers' money had been invested. This brought about a loss of support for the UDF among industrial workers.

In agriculture, the liquidation of cooperative (essentially state-owned) property led to confrontation in the countryside. This culminated in several spontaneous farmer protests against the activity of the liquidation boards and the appropriation of assets by persons close to those in power. In early autumn, president Zhelev became embroiled in the UDF internal conflict by publicly criticising government policy. There followed a series of statements by MRF leaders objecting to the right-wing policy of the UDF government. It was in such a context that the country experienced another series of strikes, some of which involved more radical action such as the blocking of trains.

Political turmoil reached its peak when the UDF government introduced a confidence vote in parliament in order to avoid further destabilisation. The vote failed on account not only of the opposition of many MRF delegates, but also of a number of UDF MPs. Subsequent negotiations between the UDF and MRF fell through and ultimately the so-called 'government of experts' under Lyuben Berov was formed with MRF backing. Despite constant political upheaval, conflicts between competing economic interests, numerous strikes and periodical criminal cases, this government survived for an unexpectedly long time – until November 1994.

The 'second' revolution of 1996–97

Background

The second stage of the Bulgarian democratic revolution was precipitated by the open-ended question of the transition to a market economy. Many factors were involved: the progressive criminalisation of the economy; inadequate state governance between 1990 and 1997; internal conflicts in both the UDF and BSP; and the deepening economic and financial crises.

The years 1993–94 were characterised by the growth of criminal business agencies and increasing mafia influence over the economy. In fact, the roots of mafia infiltration into the economy go back to the 1970s, when the BCP leadership, with the support of the secret services, began to export state capital abroad through the establishment of so-called 'trans-boundaries associations', a special kind of foreign trade company.¹⁹

Immediately after the changes in 1989 this 'red money' was personally distributed by Andrei Lukanov among loyal supporters of the regime and this aided the formation of a new 'red' business élite in Bulgaria which 'possessed greater competitive advantages' over non-communist rivals.²⁰ At this point state ownership of industry remained at nearly 90 per cent, while the procurement of all supplies for enterprises (raw materials, spare parts, machinery), as well as the sale of their end products, went through private companies. After the resignation of Lukanov in December 1990, the successive attempts by the governments of Dimitar Popov, Filip Dimitrov and Lyuben Berov to put these companies and their capital under control failed and it was only after the privatisation programme launched by the new UDF government of Ivan Kostov in 1997–99 that the era of corruption finally came to an end.

In the meantime, in the early 1990s new mechanisms were found for draining state-owned enterprises of their assets via the control of 'input and output'. In short, without making any investments or incurring heavy pay roll costs or taxation, the big private groupings made vast profits. As a result, macro-industrial structures like ferrous metalworks, machine-building plants, chemical factories and military enterprises began to experience heavy losses. Protest actions were initiated and the state took over the losses, for instance by extending necessary credits via state-owned banks. By these means the situation was temporarily resolved. Similar 'draining' mechanisms worked between private groupings and the state-owned banks: the former borrowed money at very low interest rates, and/or took out loans they knew they could either delay paying back, or not pay back at all by the simple expedient of declaring themselves bankrupt. Hence, the largest state-owned banks became 'empty' structures forming the bedrock for the crisis of 1996–97.

Problems accumulated in an increasingly criminalised economy and the subsequent crisis of the spring and summer of 1994 encouraged radical members of the BSP leadership to seek power. On 18 December 1994 the BSP won the parliamentary elections with the slogan 'Stop the downfall! Revive Bulgaria!' Throughout 1995 public trust in the government remained high, making it possible for the BSP to win the local elections in October and November relatively easily.

However, the social promises made by the BSP in their election campaigns in 1994 and 1995 and the public's expectations for improving living standards were in sharp contradiction with the realities of the economic transition, which required price liberalisation, privatisation and the closure of unprofitable enterprises. When the socialists took power in January 1995 under a new prime minister, Zhan Videnov, the market economy had not yet been put in place and their aspiration to delay such reforms deepened many problems rather than mitigating them.

The social costs of the reforms were unacceptable for the left-wing government, since already two-thirds of the Bulgarian population was living below the subsistence level. Videnov's government initially employed much pre-1990 ideology: the idea of a strong state and social equality determined the behaviour of the new administration. As a result, the privatisation of individual enterprises was curtailed in favour of so-called 'mass privatisation'. Production was set as a cabinet priority policy with the minister of industry going as far as to call on enterprises to refrain from paying back their credits. Prime minister Videnov did not dare to launch a serious economic reform programme because of the harsh short-term social consequences.²¹ This resulted in a further delay in implementing the necessary structural reforms and privatisation, which led to virtual economic deadlock.

In order to reduce as much as possible the negative social consequences of the reforms, the socialist cabinet made an attempt to reintroduce central planning. The government increasingly took control of pricing from 18.9 per cent in 1994 to 49 per cent in 1996 to 52.4 per cent in 1996.²² The price of the government's financial policy was high: customers withdrew their deposits in mass panic (the so-called 'run on the banks'), hyperinflation and a severe drop in GDP ensued and an acute financial crisis developed. After two years of non-compliance with IMF recommendations, the Videnov government was forced to comply with the reforms in order to receive further funding from that institution: inflation was to be reduced by cutting financial support to unprofitable banks and bankrupt enterprises and banks closed. However, the implementation of such harsh measures required a broad political consensus and this was sorely lacking at the time.

The sequence of bank insolvencies precipitated hyperinflation, virtually nullifying the savings and incomes of the population. The banking system at that time played an important social role because high interest rates allowed pensioners to live from the interest on their deposits. From 1996 to April 1997, the national currency was devalued by two thousand per cent. Prices increased relentlessly. Things were out of control in spite of intervention from the committee for prices. A voucher system was introduced in order to help the socialists diffuse responsibility between the central and local governments. Hyperinflation, the devaluation of the *leva* against the dollar and a steep drop in GDP led to a decline in real savings and incomes. People were now working for six to seven dollars per month, lacking money for essentials like food, clothing and shelter. Often the payment of salaries was postponed, which additionally diminished their value. The social crisis was further deepened by political scandals, corruption and bread shortages caused by the export of grain. At the beginning of 1996 Bulgaria had permitted the export of grain without first ensuring adequate provision at home. The privatisation of state granaries

had impeded quantity control and as a consequence during the spring there was a lack of bread. Prime minister Videnov did not dare use market mechanisms to overcome the crisis fearing an uncontrollable increase in the price of bread, which was unacceptable for a left-wing government.²³

In spite of the social difficulties, the cabinet turned a deaf ear to the trade unions. This led to a wave of strikes organised by the opposition and trade unions and to civil disobedience, which in some cases resembled uncontrolled street riots. The social unrest inevitably intensified the political situation.

Course of events, December 1996–February 1997

Between January and December 1996 there were a number of resignations from the BSP government, with the ministers of trade, agriculture and interior being forced to step down due to public scandals and abuses of office. The resignation of the director of the national bank, Todor Valchev, provoked a confrontation between the government and the bank, which further aggravated the financial crisis. The parliamentary opposition submitted a series of no-confidence votes in the government and public faith in the Videnov cabinet fell sharply. In October the trade unions signed an agreement for concerted action to demand a change of government and early parliamentary elections.

In November 1996 the BSP suffered an overwhelming defeat in the presidential elections. On top of this, the minister of foreign affairs, Georgi Pirinski, handed in his resignation and the former BSP prime minister Lukanov was assassinated by an unknown gunman. There was a palpable threat that the currency reserves of the Bulgarian national bank would be overspent and in these circumstances the cabinet was unable to cope with the harsh economic problems without asking for external assistance. It appealed to the IMF and accepted its recommendations for reforms in the country.²⁴ An important up-shot was that the inner-party crisis in the BSP was aggravated. Nineteen left-wing politicians (MPs and members of the party leadership) published an open letter in which they demanded the resignation of the Videnov cabinet. It was evident at this point that the government had lost internal as well as external support, and thus it tendered its resignation which was duly accepted by parliament on 28 December 1996. In conditions of severe economic, financial and political uncertainty, Bulgaria was without a government for more than twenty days: the Videnov cabinet had officially resigned and the socialists were preparing a second government headed by interior minister Nikolai Dobrev. The newly elected president, Petar Stoyanov, had not yet taken the oath of office and formally entered his duties while the outgoing president, Zhelev, was intentionally delaying a mandate to the socialists to form a new cabinet, further destabilising the situation.

On 10 January 1997, which was subsequently celebrated by some Bulgarians as a day of revolution, the parliamentary opposition (the UDF) left the parliament, because of a second postponement in the vote on its draft 'Declaration on National Salvation' proposal. The same day crowds, led by the opposition and trade unions, stormed parliament demanding pre-term elections and the socialists' removal from office. Some participants in the demonstration attacked the National Assembly building, smoke bombs were thrown through the windows and attempts were made to set the edifice on fire. Between 12 January and 4 February 1997, mass protests, meetings, processions, rallies and strikes were organised by the opposition, trade unions and students throughout the country.

On 4 February 1997, the newly appointed prime minister Nikolai Dobrev returned his mandate to president Stoyanov, who was backed by the BSP leader Georgi Parvanov. Six days later, Stoyanov was able to negotiate with the main political parties an agreement for pre-term elections whereupon a caretaker government was formed with a broad mandate aimed at overcoming the economic and financial crisis. On 12 February this goal was incorporated into a special parliamentary declaration signed by all political parties.

Outcomes

The events of early 1997 provided a new platform for rapid reform, since it became obvious that there was no time for delay or discussions. President Stoyanov urged the Bulgarian people to close 'their factory of illusions' and abandon the idea that the difficulties of the transition could be delayed or postponed. The first reform included the abandonment of the existing monetary policy and the creation of a new currency board by the National Assembly on 10 June 1997. The currency board rapidly reduced inflation, hitherto peaking at 210 per cent per annum, to a low point of less than 6 per cent. This enabled companies and individuals to make long-term plans conducive for revitalising the economy. Consequently, investment grew by more than 20 per cent annually and economic growth was stimulated.²⁵

On 24 June 1997, the IMF demanded 140 million dollars from Bulgaria. As a result, the government could no longer postpone the rising transport and energy costs and public goods rose to international prices. In order to conform to IMF requirements, the currency board imposed a number of 'necessary measures' which effectively abolished the social state – cuts in health care, higher education, primary and secondary school textbooks, budget restrictions, limits on price-setting and the closure of state enterprises.²⁶ Paradoxically, one of the most important results of the crisis was the stabilisation of the Bulgarian political arena. Before 1997, political parties were often in government for short periods and usually failed to implement their political goals. The events of January

and February 1997 allowed the UDF to win the parliamentary elections of May 1997 and return to power with an increased legitimacy. The new government under Ivan Kostov was the first since 1990 to run its full term in office, before it lost the June 2001 elections to the National Movement Simeon II.

The second stage of the democratic revolution put an end to the destructive 'war of institutions', which had lasted for almost seven years. The political climate had stabilised providing an opportunity for the executive institutions (the presidency and government) to coordinate their initiatives. The events of January 1997 also marked the birth of civil society and its ability to participate in, and influence, the political process. Furthermore, the traditional conflict between the communists and the non-communists, which had plagued the Bulgarian political system for years, had been largely overcome.

A new style of politics came into being, which was more professional, more pragmatic and wiser in its use of power. Pro-European orientations also grew, ending in Bulgaria's entry into the EU in 2007. Even so, the 1997 crisis has remained a painful memory for the BSP. The party managed to pull itself through it and successfully returned to Bulgarian politics, although it has not been easy. After the events of 1996–97, the BSP entered an acute identity crisis. Between January and March 1997, public confidence in the party reached an all time low – 13 per cent.²⁷ The BSP suffered not only domestically but also internationally, and many of its representatives in international organisations and forums left the party.

Despite the immediate criticism, the BSP leadership gained some long-term advantages by renouncing office and staying out of power between 1997 and 2005, which were not appreciated at that time. For example, the BSP had protected its image as a guarantor of democracy and constitutional order. The June 2001 parliamentary elections saw a modest comeback for the BSP, and its leader, Parvanov, was elected president of the Republic in November of that year. In 2005 he gained a second term in office, which was a real political triumph for the party, especially as it also won the parliamentary elections at the same time.

Conclusions

In Bulgaria the 'real' revolution occurred between December 1996 and February 1997. This second stage vindicated the Bulgarian opposition and in particular the UDF as a major force behind the democratic changes. It also restored public confidence in these changes. This is one of the reasons for commemoration of the events of 1997, and not those of the end of 1989 when the opposition and the people were mere spectators of the 'palace coup d'état'. Bulgarians have preferred to highlight the 'heroic

side' of the events of 1996–97 – the protests, the civil disobedience and the barricades. In doing so, the people feel that they made history and that they were authors of their own destiny. Indeed, the media preserves and stimulates these convictions every year on 10 January by paying tribute to 'the revolutionary enthusiasm' and neglecting the negative aspects of the 1997 political crisis.

The second stage of the Bulgarian revolution played an important role for society by putting an end to the 'red-blue' (communist–democrat) confrontation and clearing the way for more politically mature attitudes about state power and public duties. The best outcome of these events was the return of hope to the Bulgarian people and the normalisation of their everyday life.

Notes

- 1 National Institute of Statistics, www.nsi.bg (last accessed 16 July 2011).
- 2 J. F. Brown, *Surge for Freedom: The End of Communist Rule* (Durham and London, 1991), p. 507.
- 3 M. S. Gorbachev, *Zhizn i reformy* (Moscow, 1995), p. 368.
- 4 P. Gocheva, *DPS v sianka i na svetlina* (Sofia, 1991), pp. 86–92.
- 5 E. Kalinova and I. Baeva, *Bulgarskite prehodi 1939–2002* (Sofia, 2002), p. 246.
- 6 K. Tchakarov, *Btoriat etazh* (Sofia, 1990), p. 315.
- 7 P. Mladenov, *Zhivotat: Plusove i minusi* (Sofia, 1992), pp. 302–16.
- 8 T. Zhivkov, *Memoari* (Sofia, 1997), pp. 349–53.
- 9 Gorbachev, *Zhizn i reformy*, p. 370.
- 10 Tchakarov, *Btoriat etazh*, p. 174.
- 11 Zhivkov, *Memoari*, p. 362.
- 12 Kalinova and Baeva, *Bulgarskite prehodi*, p. 232.
- 13 Kalinova and Baeva, *Bulgarskite prehodi*, p. 249.
- 14 P. Mladenov, 'V imeto na Bulgaria. Pismo na Petar Mladenov – 24 oktombri 1989', *International Relations Review*, vol. 1 (1990), pp. 5–7.
- 15 T. Tomov, *Prevratat 10–17 noemvri* (Sofia, 1998), pp. 68–75.
- 16 E. Ivanova, *Bulgarskoto desidentstvo 1988–1989* (Sofia, 1997), pp. 222–3.
- 17 Kalinova and Baeva, *Bulgarskite prehodi*, p. 260.
- 18 E. Dainov (ed.), *The Awakening: A Chronicle of the Bulgarian Civic Uprising of January–February 1997* (Democracy Network Program, Center for Social Practices, NBU) (Sofia, 1998), p. 12.
- 19 www.decommunization.org/Articles/LToshev.htm (last accessed 16 August 2011).
- 20 R. Avramov, 'Bulgarskata stopanska reforma – chetiri godini po-kasno', *Politicheski izsledvania*, vol. 2 (1995), pp. 127–31.
- 21 Kalinova and Baeva, *Bulgarskite prehodi*, pp. 298–9.

- 22 A. Hristova et al., *Anatomia na prehoda: Stopanskata politika na Bulgaria ot 1989 do 2004* (Sofia, 2004), pp. 57–8.
- 23 Kalinova and Baeva, *Bulgarskite prehodi*, p. 299.
- 24 Hristova et al., *Anatomia na prehoda*, p. 101.
- 25 Hristova et al., *Anatomia na prehoda*, pp. 104–8.
- 26 Kalinova and Baeva, *Bulgarskite prehodi*, pp. 311–13.
- 27 UNDP, BBSS Gallup Surveys used in the Bulgarian Early Warning Reports: 1997–2002.

Part IV

**Then and now: continuity and change in the
academic and cultural perceptions of the
communist era and its aftermath**

A hopeless case of optimism? Jürgen Kuczynski and the end of the GDR*

Matthew Stibbe

‘Communism is already visible on the horizon’ declared Khrushchev in a speech.

Question from the floor: ‘Comrade Khrushchev, what is a “horizon”?’

‘Look it up in a dictionary’, replied Nikita Sergeevich.

At home the questioner found the following explanation in a reference work: ‘Horizon, an apparent line separating the sky from the earth, which retreats as one approaches it’. (Political joke from the 1960s Soviet bloc)¹

In early December 1989, Jürgen Kuczynski, the leading East German public intellectual, Marxist labour historian and self-styled ‘loyal dissident’, made an important address to a conference in Hamburg to mark the 80th birthday of Countess Marion Dönhoff in which he challenged the notion that there could ever be such a thing as ‘post-communism’. Such a concept, he suggested, was ‘politically understandable’ [*tagespolitisch verständlich*], particularly given the current crisis facing the socialist countries, but ‘historically entirely wrong’ [*historisch völlig falsch*]. What was happening instead, he argued, was a ‘return to Lenin’, a return to the man who had led the revolution in thought and deed in Russia in October 1917, and whose last great battle ‘was waged against the stultifying effects of bureaucracy, which threatened to rob the people of initiative’. Today the same struggle had been taken up by Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, whose policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* represented a reassertion of the political and social norms established by Lenin and his leading pupils. But not only in the Soviet Union:

We in the GDR, admittedly rather late in the day, have also begun a revolution of our conditions, following the example of the Soviet Union. The people, and also the mass of ordinary party members, have forced the

pace of change. It is wonderful for a Marxist of six and a half decades to witness such a powerful movement of the people ... And I am convinced that when we find ourselves once more in these rooms in twenty years time to mark the 100th birthday of Countess Dönhoff the theme of our symposium will be: the miraculous victory of socialism. And again I will take issue with the theme by asking: what is so miraculous about this? It is no miracle, but an historical inevitability! [*eine historische Selbstverständlichkeit!*].²

Opinions about Kuczynski and his role, as a critical publicist and leading party veteran, in the downfall of communism in the GDR, differ wildly. Eric D. Weitz, in his book *Creating German Communism* (1997), describes Kuczynski's call for a 'return to Lenin' as 'probably the least realistic, least meaningful slogan raised in the course of the Revolution of 1989/90'.³ With greater force, Stefan Wolle, a former dissident and historian, emphasises the essentially negative impact of *Gorbatschowianer* like Kuczynski; their decision to call for more open debate and public criticism without actually questioning the power position of the party was not merely ineffectual, but also 'propped up the arguments of those hardliners [*Dogmatiker*] who claimed that *glasnost* and *perestroika* would only lead to counter-revolution'.⁴ Konrad Jarausch, on the other hand, is more sympathetic, arguing that the regime found it much harder to uphold its legitimacy when faced with the fact that 'even party intellectuals such as Jürgen Kuczynski [were] citing the reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev as an example'.⁵ 'Within and without the party', he notes elsewhere, 'unofficial debate eroded orthodoxy'.⁶ Finally, Axel Fair-Schulz goes even further than Jarausch, noting that 'by subverting the [GDR's] attempts to construct a uniform socialist culture', *bildungsbürgerlich* or educated, middle-class Marxists like Kuczynski 'partly intentionally and partly inadvertently ... added to the pressures that undermined and eventually imploded the regime they had hoped to reform and humanize'.⁷

Using published extracts from his diaries, memoirs, newspaper articles and a variety of other sources, this paper will seek to re-evaluate Kuczynski's contribution to and understanding of the events in East Germany between 1987 and 1990. In this sense it follows Catherine Epstein in arguing that individual biography can be an important instrument for explaining not only this particular period, but the path of German communism in the twentieth century more generally.⁸ It is also influenced by Konrad Jarausch's ideas about the need to 'recover the role of individual consciousness in the collective past' as an antidote to the 'nominalist abstractions' of conventional social history writing or *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*;⁹ and by Reinhart Koselleck's theories on the relationship between history, time and the appropriation, assimilation and communication of 'experience'.¹⁰ The first two sections will analyse Kuczynski's reactions to Gorbachev against the

background of his own career, ideological beliefs and lifetime experiences. The third section will then look at his attitudes towards the refugee crisis of September 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the East German regime in October–December 1989. Finally, the concluding section will ask what light this biographical approach might shed on the character and legacy of the 1989 revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe as a whole.

Communist and critical party loyalist

Jürgen Kuczynski was born in 1904 in Elberfeld in the Rhineland and grew up in an affluent household in Schlachtensee near Berlin. He was the eldest child and only son of Robert René Kuczynski, a famous German–Jewish statistician and demographer who was well-known in left-wing and progressive circles, particularly for the part he played in chairing the ‘yes’ campaign during the 1926 referendum on dispossession of the former German princely households. After the rise of the Nazis, Robert René came to Britain where he held a chair at the London School of Economics until 1941 and continued to write and publish until his death in late 1947. Through his friendship with Harold Laski he also had strong links to the more radical, or socialist wing of the British Labour party. All six of his children (Jürgen and five daughters) eventually joined him in London. Ursula, a.k.a. Ruth Werner or ‘Sonya’, was an agent of the Soviet military intelligence (GRU) and among other things, helped to run Klaus Fuchs, the famous atom spy. She left the service with the rank of colonel, and like her brother, spent her later years in the GDR.¹¹ The four younger Kuczynski sisters stayed in England and three of them were actively involved in the Communist Party of Great Britain until its dissolution in the early 1990s.¹²

Jürgen Kuczynski himself was a passionate communist who believed that Lenin was ‘the greatest statesman since Perikles’.¹³ However, equally, and somewhat contradictorily, he was also a bourgeois scholar in the nineteenth-century German humanist tradition who defended the principles of free intellectual enquiry and ‘scientific objectivity’ against all forms of crude political or bureaucratic interference.¹⁴ During the Weimar years he studied philosophy, statistics and political economy at the universities of Erlangen, Heidelberg and Berlin, and later spent an extended period at the Brookings Institute in Washington DC. His PhD thesis, written at Erlangen in 1924/25 before his conversion to Marxism, concerned itself with abstract economic theory, but his first book, published in 1926, indicated his new political interests: it bore the title *Back to Marx*.¹⁵ Unable to secure a permanent academic position ‘for political and “racial” reasons’,¹⁶ he joined the ranks of what Detlev J. K. Peukert calls the ‘surplus generation’, namely the generation which was born after 1900 and came of age during the era of mass unemployment and political extremism in the 1920s and

1930s.¹⁷ His contemporaries included the Nazi SS leader Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945) and the onetime KPD politician and victim of Stalinist terror Heinz Neumann (1902–1937). Yet unlike these latter two, Kuczynski was also shaped by what Eric Hobsbawm calls the ‘temporary and bizarre alliance of liberal capitalism and communism’ which rescued Europe from fascist tyranny in the 1940s and defeated Hitler in 1945.¹⁸ And indeed he outlived the fascist era by over half a century, dying in 1997 aged almost 93.

Following in his father’s footsteps, Kuczynski spent the years 1936 to 1945 in Britain, where he played an important role in the London KPD group, as well as introducing his sister to Klaus Fuchs and working both as a Soviet spy and as a statistical adviser to the US Strategic Bombing Survey.¹⁹ After the war he returned to Berlin, initially as an employee of the American Office of Military Government (OMGUS) and later as a Professor at the Humboldt University. By 1950, when he moved permanently from West to East Berlin, he was already firmly established as one of the GDR’s leading experts on economic and labour history, and had also become a member of the East German parliament, the Volkskammer. In 1955 he was elected as a fellow of the German Academy of Sciences, and was thus freed from having to teach undergraduate students on a regular basis. His career suffered a temporary setback in the late 1950s, however, when he was branded a ‘revisionist’ by his fellow London exile, Kurt Hager, after courting internal party controversy with his heterodox views on the relationship between objectivity and partisanship in Marxist-Leninist historical writing. By then Hager had risen to become head of the scientific department of the Central Committee, with considerable influence over higher education and academic publishing in the GDR. As the Politburo member in charge of ideological questions from 1963, Hager’s political authority was set to grow even further, while Kuczynski never made it into the highest echelons of the party.²⁰

Even so, anybody who could maintain a deeply personal feud with Kurt Hager for over half a century, beginning in London in the 1940s and continuing in Berlin into the early 1990s, and still have a successful academic career in the GDR, clearly had to have considerable negotiating skills, or political intuition, or both. In an interview with the British journalist Anne McElvoy in 1992 Kuczynski explained his dealings with Hager by way of analogy with the Italian physicist and astronomer Galileo and his relationship with the Catholic Church, or at least Bertolt Brecht’s version of that relationship in his play *The Life of Galileo* (1943):

I am fully in agreement with Galileo. Recant when you must but carry on working on the quiet.²¹

In his autobiographical writings, Kuczynski also identified three defining moments in his political development. The first of these came on 14 July

1930, Bastille day, when he joined the German communist party and dedicated his life to serving its interests, and those of the Soviet Union, 'the mother of my party'.²² Even after 1989/90 he refused to quit, instead joining the PDS, the successor to the SED, and becoming a member of its 'committee of elders' (*Rat der Alten*).²³ 'To resign from the party', he once wrote 'would be like resigning from life, or from humanity'.²⁴

The second turning point came in 1956 when, under the impact of Khrushchev's 'secret' speech to the twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, he began to break free from the horrors of what he called 'our Stalinist period', the period in which the SED functioned as a Stalinist organisation 'against the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin'. In his controversial book *Dialogue with My Great Grandson*, written and proof-set in 1977 but not approved for publication in the GDR until late 1983, he spoke of this period as follows:

To begin with, I would like to say that I am absolutely and completely a child of the Stalin era, with all its great achievements and negative features[.] [I was] trapped by the weighty figure of Stalin, his policies, his party line, with what you might well describe as a shocking naivety, often without any critical reflection either towards myself or towards the party and the development of Marxist theory. In many respects I was more of a believer than a scientist, without ever being able to admit this to myself ... and how ashamed I am of this now, since innocence and naivety ought to have their limits, and I crossed these limits.²⁵

During the late Ulbricht and early Honecker eras, Kuczynski's anti-Stalinism was admittedly rather muted. By and large he concentrated on producing academic and popular works of history for publication in the GDR and elsewhere, and steered clear of any major battles. Although forced to give up his Volkskammer seat in 1958 after his dispute with Hager, he was able to carry on as director of the newly founded Institute of Economic History at the German Academy of Sciences and as architect of its journal, the *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*. As an expert on the history of everyday life in Germany and as a member of the SED historians' group inside the Academy, he also continued to express mildly critical views of official GDR historiography, especially where he felt that it was failing to keep ahead of relevant methodological and conceptual advances in the West.²⁶ In his memoirs he cast himself as a *linientreuer Dissident* – a dissident who loyally followed the party line – although in fact he was the exact opposite of this – an unswerving loyalist who seldom toed the line.²⁷ Thus, he stuck up for SED academic colleagues who faced criticism or worse from the party because of their supposedly 'revisionist' views, particularly if that criticism came from 'the figure of Kurt Hager'. But anyone who gave up and left for the West, like the

Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch in 1961, was beyond the pale.²⁸ At the same time, party discipline shielded him by showing him how far he could go without losing his SED membership card. In this sense he measured his influence according to the phrases *Gnade* and *Ungnade* – when he was in good standing with the party, he could afford to take extra risks on the academic and political fronts, but when he was in disgrace, he had to keep a lower profile. Meanwhile, restoring *Gnade* or good standing usually meant writing newspaper articles or reports for Honecker predicting an imminent ‘crisis of world capitalism’, hoping thereby to persuade the party General Secretary to intervene on his behalf when he faced difficulty getting his own, more critical works, into print.²⁹

In 1983, however, Kuczynski pushed the boundaries even further by managing to get published the manuscript of the above mentioned book *Dialogue with My Great Grandson*. This was a critique not only of Stalinism, but underneath of Brezhnevism (or what Ralf Dahrendorf calls ‘*nomenklatura* socialism’),³⁰ and of the whole system of centralised power and bureaucracy in the Soviet bloc which stifled democracy and initiative from below.³¹ It was also an attack on the lack of open discussion and criticism in the East German press in particular:

Many people believe that a critical stance towards real socialism is wrong. They engage in spin [*Schönfärberei*] or rather apologetics for socialism, and believe that this makes them good socialists. But in reality they are faint-hearted people who cannot see the true greatness of socialism. They fail to understand that socialism, because of its very greatness, from beginning to end, does not require apologetics.³²

Small wonder, then, that the book caused great offence to the party bosses. The Central Committee member and former director of the Karl Marx school for party cadres Hanna Wolf read it in great detail, praised many of its individual points, but found its conclusions to be ‘undialectical’, particularly in its approach to Leninism, and thus of potential use to the enemies of socialism:

Of course, not everything is yet as we would wish it to be! But was it not Lenin who taught us that we must build socialism with humanity as we find it? And the people in the GDR, have they not transformed themselves on a magnificent scale? Is my grandson (I do not know your great-grandson) not so much better, cleverer, more beautiful than I am?³³

The Politburo member and Berlin first party secretary Konrad Naumann went even further, describing the book in a public meeting with a group of students at the Humboldt University in January 1984 as the ‘most anti-state [*republikfeindlichste*] book’ that had ever appeared in the GDR. He also tried to have it banned.³⁴

In the end, Naumann's attempt failed, partly, it seems, because Honecker's daughter liked the book and recommended it to her father, who subsequently made possible the launching of second, third and fourth editions in 1984 and 1985, and the publication of an extended review in the party newspaper *Neues Deutschland* in April 1984.³⁵ But perhaps more importantly, by criticising the East German state media and bureaucracy, Kuczynski also in many ways anticipated the reforms brought in by Gorbachev in the Soviet Union after 1985. And it is to this that we now must turn.

Gorbachev, Leninism and the 'struggle against bureaucracy'

The third defining moment in Kuczynski's political development, after 1930 and 1956, came in March 1985 when Mikhail Gorbachev was appointed General Secretary of the CPSU. It is worth remembering that this turning point arose when Kuczynski himself was already into his early eighties and had been officially retired for some fifteen years. Even so, he continued to be extremely prolific both in terms of publications and in terms of academic lectures and discussions with groups of party workers at home and abroad, averaging three or four lectures per week except in the summer, or well over two hundred in total between 1987 and 1989.³⁶ As Eric Hobsbawm puts it, 'he simply could not stop himself reading and writing'.³⁷ In this respect, he considered himself to be a lifelong learner and a lifelong political activist.

One of the best ways of looking at Kuczynski's attitude towards Gorbachev is again to draw a contrast with the position adopted by his antipode, Kurt Hager. Hager, as the Hungarian writer György Dalos puts it, strove always to be 'more papal than the pope'.³⁸ He took up a position of absolute ideological hostility towards Gorbachev, regarding him as an enemy of Soviet traditions and as a danger to the stability of communist regimes in Eastern Europe.³⁹ This can be seen in his interview with the mainstream West German magazine *Stern* in April 1987, in which he famously said: 'When one's neighbour starts changing his wallpaper, one does not necessarily feel obliged to do the same!'⁴⁰ In closed meetings of the various ideological commissions of the party Central Committee Hager likewise distanced himself from any thought of reform, declaring, for instance, in October 1987:

In many fraternal parties *perestroika* [Umgestaltung] is equated with the renewal of socialism. This is not our position. Renewal presupposes degeneration, a sudden deformation of real existing socialism. In our view this does not apply in any of the socialist countries.⁴¹

By contrast, Kuczynski welcomed Gorbachev's programme of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the Soviet Union, equating it with Lenin's own 'struggle

against bureaucracy'.⁴² In particular he saw *glasnost* as a 'return to Leninism, in other words a return to the offensive against all that is wrong, to open discussion, especially with the people, and a reassertion of the importance of criticism'.⁴³ A key aspect of this was the re-emergence of genuine debate and majority voting in party, state and factory committees, and an end to resolutions based on unanimous approval only.

In an interview with the West German communist magazine *Konkret* in May 1987, which should be seen as a deliberate response to Hager's *Stern* interview and as such caused a 'scandal' in the SED Politburo,⁴⁴ Kuczynski went even further in his support for the Soviet leader:

The most important aspect of the term democracy, as Gorbachev uses it, is the involvement of the people *below* in the shaping of developments ... The demands of the workers – with regard to factory conditions, transport, food and so on – must be listened to more thoroughly. Lenin was delighted when the people were dissatisfied, because dissatisfaction means that they are involved. But this is no long the case with us, instead lethargy and passivity rule because of people's bad experiences with the bureaucrats. The level of bureaucracy we now have is indeed quite terrible.⁴⁵

The chief cause for concern in the GDR, he continued, was that the leadership had become too fearful to admit its own mistakes, a situation which stood in marked contrast to the 'boldness' of Lenin and his followers who had made great advances precisely because they were willing to be open and honest when things had gone wrong:

We have not yet learned to recognise the importance that intelligent mistakes can have, and that the discussion of such errors can be of much greater use to us than a thousand small successes.⁴⁶

This was exacerbated by the dreadful state of the East German press: 'Apart from its coverage of local and international news, no press is more boring, more stupid and more over-blown than ours', he noted in his diary in July 1987.⁴⁷ Worst of all was the deliberate distortion of economic statistics and the censoring of Soviet publications, ending in the infamous ban on the German-language edition of *Sputnik*, the Soviet weekly news sheet, in November 1988, which Kuczynski instantly recognised as 'the biggest mistake made under Honecker'.⁴⁸ Indeed, it was not just a 'mistake' but highly counter-productive. As one East Berlin worker remembered: 'Prior to Gorbachev, nobody ever looked at a Soviet newspaper, but since then the papers sold out quickly; we passed them around, talked about them. We had an incredible desire for freedom of the press'.⁴⁹ Even earlier, in March 1987, Kuczynski recalled a discussion he had had with a group of year 12 school children at a meeting of the Urania society in East Berlin:

One of the girls explained how she had compared the published text of one of Gorbachev's speeches in *N[eu]e D[eutschland]* with the original, and only 40% of the speech had been reproduced. Then she compared the 'core sentences' and only 22.2% of these had been reproduced.⁵⁰

More generally, Kuczynski was concerned at the evidence of growing alienation between the SED leadership and its base, i.e. ordinary party members, which was particularly evident at the time of the *Sputnik* ban.⁵¹ As Peter Grieder shows in his chapter in this volume, the SED in the late 1980s was partly split on generational lines, with younger activists, and especially students, usually much more pro-Gorbachev than some of the older members. Party officials at local level were often caught in the middle, and Kuczynski came into contact with many of them through travels and lectures up and down East Germany in the years 1987 to 1989. On the positive side, he supported their attempts to improve relations with the main opposition party in West Germany, the SPD, in line with the more general principle of 'peaceful coexistence'. But he was also sceptical as to whether things could go any further than 'coexistence' if the SPD ever came to power in Bonn, noting – in line with orthodox Leninist positions – that 'friendly relations between ourselves and an SPD *government* would be impossible as long as the Federal Republic were to remain a part of the Atlantic alliance' [i.e. NATO].⁵²

He also believed that the new thinking, the return to 'Leninist norms', had to move beyond foreign policy to domestic, and especially economic issues, particularly if East Germany was not to fall even further behind the West in terms of science and technology.

It's a real scandal that we believe that we cannot tell the people of our difficulties, our shortcomings, the various contradictions – although people experience all of these things in their daily lives and then are further informed about them by western television and by visitors from the Federal Republic.⁵³

But unlike some of the younger pro-Gorbachev party members, Kuczynski still did not believe in complete freedom of speech or of the press, which for him would mean 'freedom for anti-Semites, Nazis [and] friends of apartheid'.⁵⁴ He was also very critical of the 17 January 1988 demonstration in East Berlin on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Spartacist Uprising, when opposition activists had carried placards bearing Rosa Luxemburg's slogan 'Freedom is the freedom to think differently':

Of course Rosa wrote complete nonsense here. She too would have been against freedom of speech for those who believed that she and Karl [Liebknecht] should be murdered. My father, who completely shared her

views after the First World War, was forced to change his mind in the wake of the rise of fascism.⁵⁵

For all his criticism of the SED-controlled press, then, Kuczynski was still not willing to challenge what Timothy Garton Ash describes as the party's 'semantic occupation of the public sphere'.⁵⁶ For Kuczynski, whose political reference points, like so many communists of his generation, were still rooted in the 1930s and 1940s,⁵⁷ freedom of speech would be tantamount to the party surrendering its leading position in state and society and thereby abandoning the German people to the dangers of a fascist revival. It also threatened the party's policy of *Abgrenzung* or ideological separation from the West, which Kuczynski had supported ever since the word was first used by Honecker in his address to the 15th conference of the party Central Committee in 1971 to denote the view that 'peaceful coexistence' should not blunt the ongoing 'world class struggle'. Thus for Kuczynski, *Abgrenzung* had to be pursued on two different levels:

Separation in the objective sense, by means of the development of a socialist society and socialist laws ... [and] separation ... in the subjective sense ... in the emphasis on the great and beautiful things that we have achieved, in understanding all the bad things that happen today in the FRG, and the still worse things that are being prepared there.⁵⁸

Even in the summer of 1989, when Poland had staged semi-free elections and was about to hand power to the first non-communist government in the eastern bloc since the late 1940s, freedom of speech was still unthinkable in East Berlin. Indeed, Angela Stent has described Honecker's official visit to the USSR in late June 1989 as a 'dialogue of the deaf, with Gorbachev emphasizing the importance of perestroika and Honecker praising the GDR's achievements'.⁵⁹ Kuczynski therefore found himself in a difficult position, complaining on the one hand about the 'negative outcome of the elections in Poland and internal party developments in Hungary', both of which suggested the effective end of socialism in these countries, and on the other hand the 'shocking levels of inertia' shown by the SED leaders at home.⁶⁰ The only solution was to try to ignore the former and concentrate on the latter. On 8 July 1989, with Honecker again showing an alarming willingness to 'ally with Ceauşescu and resist Gorbachev' during the Warsaw Pact summit in Bucharest,⁶¹ Kuczynski decided to give an interview to the West German communist newspaper *Unsere Zeit* in which he claimed that, 'with the exception of the leadership' there was an extremely high level of support in the GDR for the changes being enacted in the Soviet Union, including at the party base. When prompted by the questioner, he also publicly denounced the *Sputnik* ban in East Germany

as ‘utter madness’ [*ein völliger Wahnsinn*] and as a wrong-headed decision made on the basis of ‘hierarchical-administrative’ thinking.⁶² As the crisis entered its final phase in the GDR, he therefore found himself once again in *Ungnade* – or disgrace – with the party bosses, a situation which lasted at least until his 85th birthday on 17 September when he received an official mention in *Neues Deutschland*, albeit without the customary photograph usually provided for esteemed party veterans.⁶³

The 1989 revolution and beyond: socialism or barbarism?

The political crisis of autumn 1989, which began with the official opening of the Hungarian border to Austria on 10–11 September and the subsequent occupation of the West German embassies in Prague and Warsaw by would-be East German emigrants, horrified Kuczynski, even if he had long expected that something like this would happen. After Honecker approved the mass exodus (or, in the official parlance, ‘expulsion’) of 14,000 embassy occupiers to West Germany via GDR territory in late September and early October 1989, he wrote:

The worst thing is the flight of so many doctors – who are scandalously underpaid here – and also of so many young people. The whole affair is a grotesque occurrence in world history, especially when one considers the huge numbers of unemployed and homeless people in the Federal Republic who should be coming over to us.⁶⁴

The use of violence and arrests against demonstrators in places like Halle, Magdeburg and East Berlin also appalled him, although he was reassured by the peaceful nature of the ‘Monday’ protests in Leipzig, especially on 2 and 9 October.⁶⁵ It was, he said, ‘not an easy time for an old comrade, who once lived in the age of Lenin and his great pupils, and now gets the occasional reprimand from the Politburo because of his attitude’.⁶⁶

He also saw even less hope for change from above after Honecker was removed as SED General Secretary at a crisis meeting of the Central Committee on 18 October 1989. Honecker’s successor, Egon Krenz, inspired little confidence, not least because he was chosen in typical bureaucratic style by unanimous vote: ‘that a group of intelligent comrades would reach such a decision unanimously is inconceivable. Lenin would have done everything in his power to dissolve such a Central Committee’. Besides which, Krenz’s acceptance speech was ‘disappointing’, with ‘not a word of genuine self-criticism’ even though he had previously been an avid supporter of Honecker’s anti-Gorbachev line.⁶⁷

But Kuczynski still saw the period October to November 1989 as a historic opportunity for the party to renew itself from the base upwards: ‘Change will come, as I have predicted in numerous meetings over the last

two years, only through pressure being exerted from *below*, both by the entire people and more particularly by [ordinary] party members.⁶⁸

Finally on 8 November he set out his main ideas in an article which appeared in *Neues Deutschland* under the title 'Conservative Revolutions'. History, he argued, citing works by Karl Marx, had known a number of examples of conservative revolutions, whereby the ruling class, the current owners of the means of production, had taken action to protect and conserve the productive economic forces being unleashed in society. The French revolution of 1789 and the Russian revolution of 1917 were clearly *not* conservative revolutions; they had ended in the overthrow of one ruling class and the rise of another. However, the English revolution of the 1640s, the French revolutions of 1830 and 1848, and – with some qualifications – the German revolution of 1918/19, were all conservative revolutions designed to uphold, not destroy, the rule of the bourgeoisie. Socialist societies clearly differed from all previous societies as they represented a higher stage of human progress and economic development. However, what Gorbachev had recognised in the Soviet Union was that even socialist societies might, from time to time, require conservative revolutions in order to overcome the stagnating effects of bureaucracy. Such revolutions in no way threatened the legacy of Lenin, but rather served to strengthen and renew socialism's productive capacities by unleashing greater democracy and greater revolutionary initiative from below.

The article ended optimistically. Previously East Germany's leaders had only expressed 'sympathy and interest' for developments in Gorbachev's Soviet Union. 'Such a formula', he wrote in an obvious dig at Hager, 'was and is exactly the same as the stance adopted by sympathetic bourgeois left-liberals towards the Bolshevik revolution in 1917'. But now, in the last few weeks, egged on by the mass of ordinary party members, the leadership had again recognised the need not only to sympathise with but to *learn* from the Soviet Union, 'without engaging in blind imitation'. And learning from the Soviet Union was the only way to win, as the saying went.⁶⁹

Even after the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November, the vote in the Volkskammer to remove the party's leading position in state and society on 1 December, and the resignation of the entire SED Central Committee and Politburo on 3 December, Kuczynski was still quite upbeat about the future, noting in his diary on 17 December that the SED/PDS might well emerge as the strongest party in the GDR as long as it avoided splits and fought a skilful election campaign.⁷⁰ Only in early 1990, when PDS membership had fallen from 2.2 to 0.8 million and the party subsequently scored only 16.3 per cent in the 18 March poll, was he forced to abandon his previous positions.⁷¹ The collapse of socialism, he wrote in the official youth magazine *Junge Welt* on 16 February, had allowed a situation where East German businesses were able to carry out 'shameless, unlawful mass

dismissals [of their employees] at a rate and speed which would not be allowed even in capitalist countries, thanks to the struggle of trade unions there'.⁷² In late May 1990 he also admitted, in a conversation with the West German communist Georg Fülberth, that in the coming unified Germany the PDS might not be able to reach the 5 per cent of the vote necessary for representation in the Bundestag 'which makes unity on the left in the [old] Federal Republic even more important [for us in the East]'.⁷³

In December 1990 the first all-German parliamentary elections indeed saw the PDS gaining only 2.4 per cent nationally, albeit with around 10–15 per cent in the new *Bundesländer* and over 30 per cent in some parts of East Berlin. A year later the Soviet Union itself collapsed. This was the final humiliation for supporters of the erstwhile GDR. Henceforth Kuczynski was forced to see (democratic) socialism as an ideal rather than an irreversible achievement. But the dangers of leaving it unmet were incalculable, especially in a world now dominated by capitalism, high levels of unemployment, widespread cynicism and the loss of 'progressive' political ambition. The short twentieth century, the 'age of extremes' as Eric Hobsbawm called it in his 1994 book, had indeed 'not ended well' in Kuczynski's view:

As far as the whole of humanity and every single human being is concerned, I can think of nothing worse than wishing on them another century [like the one we have just had].⁷⁴

And yet like Marx and Engels, and more forcefully than Hobsbawm, Kuczynski was an optimist as far as the future was concerned. He was the 'most optimistic' of his party colleagues, he noted, because, being older, he had had the 'most experience of history'.⁷⁵ And this experience had made him confident that in the end humanity would choose socialism over 'barbarity', even if he personally would not live to see this day. In his last book, *Continued Dialogue with My Great Grandson* (1996), he wrote:

How did Marx and Engels put it? Socialism or barbarism, these are the two alternative paths of human development. And they did not know with certainty which of the two alternatives would eventually succeed. But although they did not know, they had faith in, and firmly hoped for, the victory of socialism.⁷⁶

He may also have been able to comfort himself with a quote from Engels he first used in volume 2 of his *History of the Everyday Life of the German People*, published in the early 1980s: 'History is its own path, and no matter how dialectically it proceeds in the final analysis, dialectics often has to wait for history to [actually] come along'.⁷⁷

As for the present, all Kuczynski could do to counter the propaganda of the newly reunified Germany was to draw up a rather banal balance sheet

of the supposed achievements of the GDR in terms of full employment, free childcare, subsidised housing and a minimum basic existence for all. But he adamantly rejected any form of cheap nostalgia for the good old days before 1989, when there was 'less freedom of the press than under Frederick the Great'.⁷⁸ He should, he said in his last book, have condemned the Honecker regime as a 'feudal-absolutist command system' [*feudalabsolutisches Kommandosystem*] but praised its individual accomplishments on the path to socialism, instead of accepting the regime and all its *Grundfehler*, while criticising some of its more trivial shortcomings.⁷⁹ Even so, if he could start his life again, he would still opt to live in a country that was 25 per cent socialist rather than one which was 100 per cent capitalist.⁸⁰

Conclusion

What light, then, does this biographical approach shed on the meaning of 1989 overall? On one level it is tempting to end with Timothy Garton Ash's comment that, in trying to understand what motivated old communists to stick with their out-moded, authoritarian ideologies, 'one must never underestimate the human capacity for self-deception'.⁸¹ Certainly before 1990 Kuczynski deceived himself admirably on several points, and two in particular: first, that the party would never abandon power having achieved it in the USSR in 1917 and in East Germany in 1949; and, second that the victory of socialism was inevitable and irreversible, the result of scientifically proven laws.

To the first point, we might note that the communist period clearly has been replaced by a new, uncertain era, with all its promises, achievements and disappointments for the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe and of Russia itself. Gorbachev's reforms in the late 1980s, and conversely the GDR leadership's stubborn opposition to reform, came too late to save the old regime; both simply hastened its end. Or, as David Priestland puts it, enlisting the notion of unintended consequences, Gorbachev's decision to wage war on bureaucracy, and the bureaucrats' decision to resist him, 'eventually led to the destruction of the system itself'.⁸²

And to the second point, we might agree with Anne McElvoy that in East Germany 'the final battle [for socialism] was cancelled due to lack of interest' in 1989/90.⁸³ Since 1990 the vast majority of East Germans have voted against the PDS and its successor party, *Die Linke*, although the 11.9 per cent scored in the Bundestag election of September 2009 was a marked improvement on previous performances. Furthermore, even on the left there has been no significant support for new ideologies or a putative 'Third Way', a fact celebrated by key western thinkers and intellectuals like Ralf Dahrendorf and Timothy Garton Ash. We could even quote

here Richard Vinen's anti-utopian comments in his book *A History in Fragments: Europe in the Twentieth Century* (2000):

The revolutions of 1989 – at least in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and East Germany – had the advantage of limited expectations. No one talked of 'new men' or the Robespierrian incorruptibility of the true revolutionary. It was understood that politics was not an end but simply a means of earning freedom to do something else.⁸⁴

However, this is where I think the argument goes too far in an ahistorical direction. Our task as historians is not to judge on the basis of what Francis Spufford calls the 'easy enlightenments of the present'⁸⁵ but to contextualise and explain the past in terms of the constant movement of thoughts and ideas, memories and hopes, within and between generations. As Reinhart Koselleck has argued, this *historical* movement of time cannot be understood in purely chronological terms; rather, it has to be seen as an ongoing and open-ended relationship between the 'space of experience' and the ever changing, constantly moving 'horizon of expectation'. In other words, 'concrete history [is] produced within the medium of particular experiences and particular expectations'.⁸⁶ To take one obvious example, in the late 1980s reformers like Kuczynski did not foresee or imagine the collapse of communism, but rather confidently expected the future of *glasnost* to lead to meaningful political change in close step with the Soviet Union, and to a new, rejuvenated, progressive society, free from the suffocating bureaucracy of the Brezhnev era. It was a vision also shared by Gorbachev himself, at least until 1990, as Victor Sebestyen has recently noted:

Gorbachev believed in socialism and was convinced that Lenin had outlined the true path, but the project had gone wrong when Stalin deviated from it and 'misrepresented' it. That was a powerful illusion [which] he and many Communist true believers shared. Perestroika, Gorbachev thought, would [be a] return to Lenin's ideals. [He] often talked of Lenin, whom he spoke of reverentially as a 'special genius'. There was no cynicism involved ... When he quoted Lenin, as he frequently did, it was because he thought the founder of the Soviet Union had a special relevance to his own situation seventy years on.⁸⁷

Of course the pro-Gorbachev intellectuals in the SED waited too long in the wings, and failed to act before it was too late. In ideological terms they were conservative thinkers who – in contrast to Gorbachev himself – refused to break with Marxist-Leninist dogmas, even after 1989. Before 1989 they were also too eager to stay in grace with the party, to keep on the good side of authoritarian dictators like Ulbricht and Honecker, and to prove their loyalty to socialism. In no way, then, can they be described

as ‘dissidents’. They were even criticised by more radical Marxist academic colleagues who questioned their assertion that certain truths about the communist past should remain closed to public discussion and debate.⁸⁸ But, as paradoxical as this might sound, without such hopes and visions as contained in the slogan ‘back to Lenin’ there would have been no *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the Soviet Union; and events in the GDR might also have turned out very differently. Or, to put it another way, loyal but critical party intellectuals, whose own expectations of the future relationship between past and present were still imbued both with socialist ideals and with what Robin Okey refers to in this volume as ‘Marxism-Leninism’s messianic pretensions’, may well have played a minor, albeit neglected role in ensuring the *peaceful* collapse of communist regimes in 1989, alongside environmental and student activists campaigning for human rights and democracy, and ‘the people’ demanding the ‘freedom to do something else’.⁸⁹

Finally, returning to Eric D. Weitz’s comments at the beginning of this chapter, I would agree that Kuczynski’s ideas in 1989 were unrealistic, over-optimistic, even delusional⁹⁰ – but they are meaningful nonetheless: meaningful both as a means of explaining the place of the GDR in the twentieth century’s ‘age of extremes’, and of men like Kuczynski, life-long admirers of the Soviet Union, within it. In this sense, the events of November–December 1989 really did sweep away ‘an entire universe of ... customs, mentalities and institutions’,⁹¹ but in a more contingent and indeterminate way than the triumphalist anti-communist rhetoric of recent years would suggest. Only by approaching 1989 as part of the open-ended movement of time, and by recognising what Koselleck calls the ‘temporality of men’ and thus the ‘temporality of history’,⁹² can we understand why old Marxists like Kuczynski could still see socialism on the horizon after 1989, even if they recognised that the twentieth century’s march towards it had, at least for the time being, only made it retreat further away.

Notes

* The phrase ‘a hopeless case of optimism’ comes from Kuczynski’s own memoir-cum-diary *Ein hoffnungsloser Fall von Optimismus? Memoiren 1989–1994*, 2nd edn (Berlin, 1995). I would like to thank Christina Morina for her helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this chapter.

1 A. Drozdynski, *Der politische Witz im Ostblock* (Düsseldorf, 1974), p. 80. Cited in R. Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. and intro. K. Tribe (New York, 2004) [1979], p. 261.

2 J. Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre – mit einem besseren Ende?: Tagebuchblätter 1987–1989* (Berlin, 1990), pp. 185–9.

- 3 E. D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890–1990: From Popular Protests to Socialist State* (Princeton, 1997), p. 394, n. 19.
- 4 S. Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1971–1989* (Bonn, 1998), pp. 315–16.
- 5 K. H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945–1995* (Oxford, 2006), p. 204.
- 6 Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (Oxford, 1994), p. 58.
- 7 A. Fair-Schulz, *Loyal Subversion: East Germany and Its Bildungs-bürgerlich Marxist Intellectuals* (Berlin, 2009), p. 13.
- 8 C. Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and Their Century* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2003).
- 9 K. H. Jarausch, 'Towards a Social History of Experience: Postmodern Predicaments in Theory and Interdisciplinarity', *Central European History*, vol. 22, nos. 3–4 (1989), pp. 427–43 (here pp. 431, 441–2). See also the excellent collections of essays edited by Jarausch, *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (Oxford, 1999).
- 10 Koselleck, *Futures Past*, passim.
- 11 R. Werner, *Sonya's Report* (London, 1992). On Werner, see also A. McElvoy, *The Saddled Cow: East Germany's Life and Legacy* (London, 1992), pp. 28–38.
- 12 Information supplied by Amila Y'Mech, son of Kuczynski's youngest sister, Renate Simpson, to the author.
- 13 J. Kuczynski, *Fortgesetzter Dialog mit meinem Urenkel: Fünfzig Fragen an einen unverbesserlichen Urgroßvater* (Berlin, 1996), p. 93.
- 14 These contradictions are expertly examined in Fair-Schulz, *Loyal Subversion*, passim. For a specific example of the way in which Kuczynski sought to reconcile his Leninism with 'objective' historical writing see also M. Stibbe, 'Fighting the First World War in the Cold War: East and West German Historiography on the Origins of the First World War, 1945–1959', in T. Hochscherf, C. Laucht and A. Plowman (eds), *Divided But Not Disconnected: German Experiences of the Cold War* (New York and Oxford, 2010), pp. 34–48.
- 15 J. Kuczynski, *Zürück zu Marx! Antikritische Studien zur Theorie des Marxismus* (Leipzig, 1926).
- 16 J. Kuczynski, *Memoiren: Die Erziehung des J. K. zum Kommunisten und Wissenschaftler* (East Berlin and Weimar, 1973), p. 89.
- 17 D. J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, translated from the German by Richard Deveson (London, 1991) [1987], pp. 14–18.
- 18 E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London, 1994), p. 7.
- 19 Werner, *Sonya's Report*, pp. 250–2, 259–61.
- 20 For an excellent overview of Kuczynski's academic career, see M. Keßler,

- Exilerfahrung in Wissenschaft und Politik: Remigrierte Historiker in der frühen DDR* (Cologne, 2001), pp. 91–145. The crisis in Kuczynski's career in the late 1950s is covered in detail in Horst Haun, *Kommunist und "Revisionist": Die SED-Kampagne gegen Jürgen Kuczynski (1956–1959)* (Dresden, 1999). On the animosity between Hager and Kuczynski see also M. Stibbe, 'Jürgen Kuczynski and the Search for a (non-existent) Western Spy Ring in the East German Communist Party in 1953', *Contemporary European History*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2011), pp. 61–79.
- 21 McElvoy, *The Saddled Cow*, p. 39. Cf. Kuczynski, *Ein hoffnungsloser Fall von Optimismus?*, p. 153.
 - 22 Kuczynski, *Memoiren*, p. 198.
 - 23 On Kuczynski's time in the PDS see his *Ein hoffnungsloser Fall von Optimismus?*, passim; and his *Fortgesetzter Dialog*, pp. 168–76.
 - 24 Kuczynski, *Memoiren*, p. 198.
 - 25 J. Kuczynski, *Dialog mit meinem Urenkel: Neunzehn Briefe und ein Tagebuch*, 2nd edn (East Berlin and Weimar, 1984), pp. 77 and 81.
 - 26 G. G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover and London, 1997), pp. 75, 84; Iggers, *Marxist Historiography in Transformation: New Orientations in Recent East German History* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 25, 38–42; A. Fair-Schulz, "'Tons of Wasted Paper?'" Jürgen Kuczynski and East German Historiography', in Q. E. Wang and F. L. Fillafer (eds), *The Many Faces of Clio: Cross-Cultural Approaches to Historiography: Essays in Honor of Georg G. Iggers* (New York and Oxford, 2007), pp. 382–401.
 - 27 J. Kuczynski, *Ein linientreuer Dissident: Memoiren 1945–1989*, 2nd edn (Berlin and Weimar, 1992).
 - 28 J. Kuczynski, *Frost nach dem Tauwetter: Mein Historikerstreit* (Berlin, 1993), p. 76. See also J. Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech and Polish Higher Education, 1945–1956* (Chapel Hill and London, 2000), pp. 198–9. Kuczynski's decision to denounce his former friend Bloch in an open letter signed 'hatefully yours' reminds one of Sigmund Freud's observations in *Totem and Taboo* (1913): 'Anyone who has violated a taboo becomes taboo himself because he possesses the dangerous quality of tempting others to follow his example: why should *he* be allowed to do what is forbidden to others? Thus he is truly contagious in that every example encourages imitation, and for that reason he himself must be shunned.' Cited from the 1950 Routledge edn, p. 32.
 - 29 A good example here would be the five page report, headed 'Zur Wirtschaftslage in der Welt des Kapitals', which Kuczynski sent to Honecker in November 1984 – copy in Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin (henceforth ZLB Berlin), Kuczynski papers, Kuc-8-2-H458. See also McElvoy, *The Saddled Cow*, pp. 39–40; and C. Luft, 'Eröffnung des

- Kolloquiums anlässlich des 100. Geburtstages von Jürgen Kuczynski', in W. Girnus (ed.), *Sozialistischer Weltbürger und Enzyklopädist: Mosaiksteine zu Jürgen Kuczynski* (Leipzig, 2007), pp. 9–12 (here p. 11).
- 30 R. Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* (London, 1990), p. 44.
 - 31 Kuczynski, *Dialog mit meinem Urenkel*, p. 15.
 - 32 Kuczynski, *Dialog mit meinem Urenkel*, p. 28. On the original proofs of the book, which were sent to the Politburo following a special order concerning all memoirs of party veterans in 1977, Hager highlighted the sentence: 'But in reality they are faint-hearted people who cannot see the true greatness of socialism' for possible revision or exclusion, along with many other passages, including one in which it was suggested that the quest for security had led to 'unnecessary levels of caution' at the top tiers of society. However, Kuczynski managed to avoid most of the requested changes when the book was finally published in 1983. See also Kuczynski, *Dialog mit meinem Urenkel: Neunzehn Briefe und ein Tagebuch*, first unabridged and uncensored edn (Berlin, 1996), pp. 34, 17.
 - 33 Wolf to Kuczynski, 4 January 1984, in Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv Berlin (henceforth SAPMO-BA), DY 30/2559, Bl. 1–13 (here Bl. 2–3). Copies of this letter were sent to all members and candidate members of the SED Politburo on 24 April 1984. See also Kuczynski's private reply to Wolf, 2 February 1984, in ZLB Berlin, Kuczynski papers, Kuc-8-3-215–6, in which he refuted her charges by quoting Lenin's speech at the third world congress of the Comintern in 1921: 'We should not hide our errors out of fear that the enemy could exploit this. Whoever takes such a line is no revolutionary.'
 - 34 Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, p. 11.
 - 35 Ibid., p. 28. See also Kuczynski to Honecker, 6 April 1984, in ZLB Berlin, Kuczynski papers, Kuc-8-2-H450; and Kuczynski to Honecker, 20 March 1985, in SAPMO-BA, DY 30/2560, Bl. 1.
 - 36 Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, p. 57. Cf. J. Kuczynski, 'Konservative Revolutionen', *Neues Deutschland*, 8 November 1989, p. 4.
 - 37 E. Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (London, 2002), p. 46.
 - 38 G. Dalos, *Der Vorhang geht auf: Das Ende der Diktaturen in Osteuropa* (Munich, 2009), p. 18.
 - 39 Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, p. 256.
 - 40 Hager interviewed in *Stern*, 9 April 1987. Cited in P. Grieder, '“To Learn from the Soviet Union Is to Learn How to Win”: The East German Revolution, 1989–90', in K. McDermott and M. Stibbe (eds), *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 157–74 (here p. 164). See also Grieder's contribution (chapter 4) to this volume.

- 41 Hager's speech to leaders of the social science institutes attached to the SED Central Committee, 12 October 1987. Cited in J. Petzold, *Parteinahme wofür? DDR-Historiker im Spannungsfeld von Politik und Wissenschaft*, edited by M. Sabrow (Potsdam, 2000), p. 321.
- 42 Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, p. 180.
- 43 Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, p. 35. Interestingly, the West German liberal Ralf Dahrendorf, citing Ernest Gellner, also interpreted the 'official line' of the Soviet Union under Gorbachev as being to 'hold on to the October Revolution and Lenin's heritage as the "legitimate orthodoxy"' – see Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*, p. 16. As late as March 1989 Gorbachev told the Hungarian prime minister Miklós Németh that 'The proper path is to go back to the roots of Leninism' – cited in M. Meyer, *The Year That Changed the World: The Untold Story Behind the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (London, 2009), p. 56.
- 44 Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, p. 45.
- 45 'Kuczynski-Interview: "Die Bürokratie muß vernichtet werden"', *Konkret*, May 1987, pp. 23–5 (here p. 24). Copy in ZLB Berlin, Kuczynski papers, Kuc-1–2–1731.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, p. 50.
- 48 Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, p. 123.
- 49 Cited in S. Pfaff, *Exit-Voice Dynamics and the Collapse of East Germany: The Crisis of Leninism and the Revolution of 1989* (Durham and London, 2006), p. 53.
- 50 Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, p. 36.
- 51 Cf. Pfaff, *Exit-Voice Dynamics*, pp. 54–5.
- 52 Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, p. 56. Emphasis in the original. On the contacts between the SPD and the SED in the late 1980s see also T. Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (London, 1993), esp. pp. 312–42.
- 53 Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, p. 67.
- 54 Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, p. 75.
- 55 Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, p. 73.
- 56 T. Garton Ash, *We the People: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague* (London, 1990), p. 137.
- 57 See also Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, esp. pp. 44–99; McElvoy, *The Saddled Cow*, pp. 45–6; and Fair-Schulz, "'Tons of Wasted Paper?'", pp. 393–4.
- 58 J. Kuczynski, 'Abgrenzung', *Neues Deutschland*, 10 February 1971. Reproduced in C. Kleßmann, *Zwei Staaten, eine Nation: Deutsche Geschichte 1955–1970* (Göttingen, 1988), pp. 593–4.
- 59 A. Stent, *Russia and Germany Reborn: Unification, the Soviet Collapse and the New Europe* (Princeton, 1999), p. 84.
- 60 Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, p. 158.

- 61 Meyer, *The Year That Changed the World*, p. 93.
- 62 Kuczynski interview in *Unsere Zeit*, 8 July 1989, in Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, pp. 10–11. The mainstream West German press also picked up on the significance of this interview – see, for example, Werner Kahl, ‘Kassandra denkt um’, *Die Welt*, 15 July 1989. Copy in ZLB Berlin, Kuczynski papers, Kuc 1-2-7119.
- 63 Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, p. 174.
- 64 Ibid., p. 177. The figure of 14,000 comes from D. Childs, *The Fall of the GDR* (Harlow, 2001), p. 68.
- 65 Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, pp. 178–9.
- 66 Kuczynski, ‘Konservative Revolutionen’.
- 67 Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, pp. 179–80.
- 68 Ibid., p. 179. Emphasis in the original.
- 69 Kuczynski, ‘Konservative Revolutionen’.
- 70 Kuczynski, *Schwierige Jahre*, p. 191.
- 71 Kuczynski, *Ein hoffnungsloser Fall von Optimismus?*, pp. 33–5.
- 72 H. Bahrmann and C. Links, *Chronik der Wende: Die Ereignisse in der DDR zwischen 7. Oktober 1989 und 18. März 1990*, new edn (Berlin, 1999), p. 237.
- 73 Kuczynski, *Ein hoffnungsloser Fall von Optimismus?*, p. 36.
- 74 Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 17; Kuczynski, *Fortgesetzter Dialog*, p. 237. Kuczynski had read Hobsbawm’s book – see Kuczynski to Hobsbawm, 26 May 1995, in ZLB Berlin, Kuczynski papers, Kuc-2-1-H1925.
- 75 Kuczynski, *Ein hoffnungsloser Fall von Optimismus?*, p. 35: ‘Ich bin wohl der Optimistischste, weil der historisch Erfahrenste’. See also Kuczynski’s interview in the *Ostthüringer Zeitung*, 17 September 1994, on the occasion of his 90th birthday. Copy in ZLB Berlin, Kuczynski papers, Kuc-1-2-9087.
- 76 Kuczynski, *Fortgesetzter Dialog*, p. 28. Also cited in H. Laitko, ‘“Sozialismus oder Barbarei”? Jürgen Kuczynski und das Problem der historischen Alternativen’, in Girnus (ed.), *Sozialistischer Weltbürger und Enzyklopädist*, pp. 13–28 (here p. 22).
- 77 Kuczynski, *Geschichte des Alltags des deutschen Volkes*, vol. 2: 1650–1810 (East Berlin, 1981), p. 7. Cited in Fair-Schulz, ‘“Tons of Wasted Paper?”’, p. 391.
- 78 Kuczynski, *Ein hoffnungsloser Fall von Optimismus?*, pp. 303–4.
- 79 Kuczynski, *Ein hoffnungsloser Fall von Optimismus?*, p. 152; Kuczynski, *Fortgesetzter Dialog*, pp. 9–11.
- 80 McElvoy, *The Saddled Cow*, p. 47.
- 81 Garton Ash, *We the People*, pp. 136–7.
- 82 D. Priestland, *The Red Flag: Communism and the Making of the Modern World* (London, 2009), p. 534.
- 83 McElvoy, *The Saddled Cow*, p. 46.

- 84 R. Vinen, *A History in Fragments: Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London, 2000), p. 487.
- 85 F. Spufford, 'Inside the Past', *Guardian* (3 September 2011), Review Section, p. 20.
- 86 Koselleck, *Futures Past*, p. 258.
- 87 V. Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989: The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (London, 2009), pp. 136–7. For further evidence of Gorbachev's attachment to Lenin see also James Krapfl's afterword in this volume.
- 88 Fair-Schulz, *Loyal Subversion*, pp. 211–12; Fair-Schulz, "'Tons of Wasted Paper?'"', pp. 393–4.
- 89 Even the highly critical historian Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, in his book *Endspiel: Die Revolution von 1989 in der DDR* (Munich, 2009), p. 372, notes that some figures in the dissident *Neues Forum* movement in September 1989 actively sought dialogue with 'the forces of reform' inside the SED. Among them he lists Jürgen Kuczynski alongside Hans Modrow, Markus Wolf and Gregor Gysi: 'Das mag heute absurd klingen, in diesen Septembertagen lachte darüber nur eine Minderheit. Denn es ging darum, ein möglichst breites Bündnis gegen die SED-Politbürokratie zu schmieden'.
- 90 Kuczynski admitted as much just two years later – see his *Kurze Bilanz eines langen Lebens* (Berlin, 1991), pp. 35–6.
- 91 Phrase used by Simon Schama to describe the French revolution, although he qualifies this with use of the word 'apparently' – see S. Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London, 1989), p. xiv.
- 92 Koselleck, *Futures Past*, p. 258.

Meanings of 1989: right-wing discourses in post-communist Poland

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One does not have to be a very careful observer of Polish political life to see that the events and phenomena which took place in 1989 have become crucial points of reference and constitutive elements of political discourse. Despite the prevalent view of 1989 in Poland as a peaceful negotiated extrication from communism, the real meaning of the 1989 events has been one of the most divisive issues in Poland. Marjorie Castle accurately captures the paradoxical nature of the transition in Poland by claiming that one of its important legacies was ‘the discrediting of political bargaining as a way of resolving conflict.’¹

Complaints about the lack of a revolutionary moment in Polish politics had already been voiced before the presidential and parliamentary elections of 1990–91. The Solidarity camp became internally divided over the question of how to deal with the non-democratic past and its representatives. This division and subsequent dissolution of the movement opened the way for the formation of right-wing parties. Moreover, it strengthened their anti-communist identity and enabled them to use anti-communist arguments in their struggles with other post-Solidarity parties. The term ‘pink’, used to refer to those Solidarity people who negotiated with the regime, reveals this mechanism of internal stigmatisation very well. It helped newly constituted right-wing parties to delegitimise their opponents, particularly those from the same side of the political spectrum.

The criticism of the 1989 pact and the idea of a ‘betrayed revolution’ were even stronger after the bitter defeats of 1993 and 1995 when parliamentary and presidential elections were held. The capture of parliamentary seats and the office of president by the post-communist left only reinforced anti-communist resentments and the critical assessment of the peaceful transition of 1989–91. Until 1997 strong anti-communist rhetoric was used to attack the Democratic Left Alliance – the then governing post-communist party. Not surprisingly, in the run up to the

parliamentary elections of 1997 right-wing groupings coined slogans about completing the revolution of 1989, implying their negative assessment of previous events.² The implicit or explicit critical references to 1989 also proved relevant in the 2005 parliamentary elections when two populist parties, the League of Polish Families and Self-Defence, were able to secure a significant number of seats through outspoken opposition to the allegedly oligarchic system born at the Round Table talks in 1989. In 2009 politicians from two dominant right-wing parties, the incumbent Civic Platform and the opposition Law and Justice Party, were not able to reach agreement concerning a common commemoration of the Round Table events.³

To sum up, the Round Table served a twofold function for the right-wing parties. In their relations with the post-communist left, it was used to emphasise the steered and corrupted nature of Polish democracy – a fact exemplified perfectly by the mere presence of a post-communist left-wing party in Polish politics. On the other hand, in relations among right-wing parties the Round Table category proved its significance as well. It served as a device to reveal and stigmatise alleged connections with post-communists or to accuse opponents of following policies invented by the ‘reds’ and ‘pinks’ during the Round Table discussions. Hence, the persistent internal struggles within the post-Solidarity camp at a time when the right wing was in power (1997–2001; 2005 to the present).

Not surprisingly, then, ‘the Round Table’ has become a keyword, often used in media texts and the utterances of right-wing politicians.⁴ It is intimately connected with two other categories, ‘Magdalenka’ and the ‘thick line’. All three have appeared frequently in political discourse. Moreover, all were elements used to construct the definition of Poland’s situation after 1989. Right-wing politicians used them in the political struggle, imbuing them with different meanings and seizing any opportunity to refer to them, especially in the 1990s.

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the structure of meaning built around these three terms, denoted collectively by the 1989 category. Such an analysis will reveal the various interpretations of 1989 adopted by right-wing political parties as key actors responsible for discourse production, reproduction and distribution.

The Polish context

The Round Table category was applied for the first time to describe talks between representatives of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) and Solidarity between 6 February and 5 April 1989, which led, among other things, to the first semi-free elections in June.⁵ ‘Round Table’ was an expression initially used in June 1988 by General Wojciech Jaruzelski

during the 7th Plenum of the PZPR Central Committee, which discussed the law on associations.

'Magdalenka' is a category used after the name of the small town where, as early as 1988, the first contacts were initiated between the government and opposition in the premises of the ministry of interior. It played a crucial role during the Round Table negotiations, providing the platform for preliminary contact between the authorities and the opposition. Whenever talks faced obstacles, a smaller group of negotiators would meet in Magdalenka to work on the details of future agreements and solve divisive issues. After reaching consensus, the details were subsequently discussed at the plenary meetings of the Round Table. However, no matter how helpful the Magdalenka meetings were in overcoming deadlocks, their secret character aroused suspicions of conspiratorial deals between the negotiators.⁶

The last of our categories, the 'thick line', is connected with the policy speech given by prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki on 24 August 1989 in the Sejm, the lower chamber of the Polish parliament.⁷ Originally, the 'thick line' category was used to differentiate the communist period from the new, embryonic democratic reality. Mazowiecki wanted to separate discussion of the non-democratic past from his own efforts to reform the country. Although the 'thick line' was interpreted by the prime minister as a symbolic device used to define two distinct periods,⁸ the logic of political struggle changed the meaning of the category, which soon after the speech became a symbol of the 'forgive and forget' approach of the Mazowiecki government and the 'Solidarity left' towards the former communists.

Why have these three categories created so much tension among political elites? What are the origins of all this divisiveness? The most convincing answer to date has been given by Jan Kubik who emphasises Poland's cultural legacy as the main factor behind the country's 'overheated' political struggles.⁹ This legacy is related to the political and cultural conflict lines established during the communist period. The Polish anti-communist revolution was possible due to massive popular oppositional activity in the 1970s and early 1980s. It led to the construction of a counter-hegemonic vision which served to delegitimise the regime. The main cultural frame which fuelled this vision was based on a strong polar division between 'we/the people/Solidarity' versus 'them/the authorities/the communists'. Despite a gradual decline in social activism after 1981, this bipolar cleavage was upheld by the majority of citizens, deeply affecting the shape of political culture. Not surprisingly, the Round Table negotiations complicated the structure of these divisions. Not only did the strong rift between 'us' and 'them' cease to be as clear as it had been before 1989, but a new caesura appeared, between negotiators and those excluded from the talks. That was the moment when the previously sharp

picture of the two opposing sides lost its clarity, paving the way for fresh internal schisms within the ‘Solidarity’ camp. ‘The excluded’ almost immediately developed a discourse which questioned the negotiators’ motivations, and then suspended or even dissolved the distinction between communists (‘reds’) and the opposition (‘pinks’). This founding moment of the new right-wing discourse, critical of the Round Table talks and/or their outcomes, turned out to be a long-lasting phenomenon. It was further enhanced and elaborated during the so-called ‘war at the top’, when the right criticised the Mazowiecki government for slowing down the pace of the transformation and for adopting a soft policy towards post-communists; and it structured public discourse for the next twenty years by providing arguments, images and other discursive resources for various groups competing to offer the clearest anti-communist vision. In this second, post-Solidarity phase, as Castle names it, some right-wing politicians even suggested that the Round Table pact represented nothing more than a historic betrayal.¹⁰ However, no matter how strongly and ridiculously such voices were raised after 1989, it would be an oversimplification to reduce them to only two contrasting positions and a number of simple slogans used to smear political opponents. A more interesting task would be to expose the complexity of the discourses on the Round Table talks and their consequences, and to reconstruct the internal tensions between the various post-Solidarity right-wing positions.

Approach and research questions

In this chapter, I adopt a theoretical perspective that draws on several assumptions about discursive approaches in the social sciences.¹¹ First, discourse is perceived as a language in use; in this case, the language used in the institutionally defined political sphere. It is understood as a type of practice which constitutes, naturalises, sustains and changes significations of the world. Second, discourse brings into play a particular kind of order by dictating what it is possible to say and what must not be said in the public realm. Any given order is based on a contingent, historically specific set of rules that allow all objects and actions to acquire their meaning. The specific meaning of a certain signifier is acquired only through discursive articulation made through the connection of different elements into a new constellation. Third, I follow the ontological assumptions of Ernesto Laclau concerning politics as the realm of ineradicable antagonism. Finally, given that meanings are never fixed, the interpretive practices of political agents are extremely significant.¹² They do not simply differ in their interpretation of reality, but struggle to achieve power through the imposition of specific representations of reality.¹³

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the different discursive strategies

adopted in the struggle to define the three key categories which have constituted the collective political memory of 1989: the Round Table, Magdalenka and the 'thick line'. In order to determine the conflicting representations of the 1989 events among right-wing parties, four aspects of political discourse are examined. First, I consider the general evaluation of the events of 1989 and the set of arguments used to justify this assessment. Second, I discuss the phenomenon of agency as it is constructed in the representations of 1989. Where is the source of power located? Is it the communists who initiate all the steps, or the opposition? What is the role of structural conditions, independent of individual agency? Third, I evaluate the persisting allegations of conspiracy and subterfuge which always appear in the context of 1989. Do the representations of 1989 resort to arguments which stress divisions between the open and behind-the-scenes operations? If yes, how important are they for the arguments provided? To what extent is secrecy or even conspiracy used as an explanatory tool to highlight the meaning of 1989? Do the political actors raise the issue of betrayal, secret deals or behind-the-scenes plots? Fourthly, according to right-wing politicians, were there any alternatives to the events and processes that actually took place?

These four problems (general evaluation, structure and agency, the conspiracy issue and possible alternatives), with a set of corresponding questions, serve as a matrix to analyse the public statements of right-wing politicians in Poland between 1990 and 2000, including manifestos, press interviews, book-length interviews and articles published by the politicians themselves and, in some cases, journalists with explicitly political affiliations. A particularly important source of information is the transcripts of speeches given by Polish right-wing politicians at the conference 'Communism's negotiated collapse' organised by the University of Michigan in 1999.

Despite the plurality of actors constructing political discourse after 1989, some of them were more influential than others. In the period under consideration, three names representing different lines of right-wing thinking are especially important. The first one is Aleksander Hall, a leader of the Conservative Party, a columnist for the mass-circulation Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* and a minister in Mazowiecki's government from 1989 to 1990. The second is Jarosław Kaczyński, head of the Centre Agreement, the most influential right-wing party in the 1990s. The third, Jan Olszewski, was the leader of the Movement for the Republic and subsequently the Movement for Poland's Reconstruction, and a former prime minister, whose government was overthrown following controversy over its lustration policies in 1992.

Analysis

My analysis reveals three different positions occupied by political actors in the discourse on 1989. At the risk of generalisation, these three positions can be identified as (1) affirmative, (2) critical and (3) rejectionist. Despite some common assumptions between them, these positions were so deeply divided over the meaning and significance of 1989 that it is fully justified to treat them separately.

Affirmative discourse

In the affirmative discourse, the Round Table is not uncritically glorified. The characteristic feature of right-wing discourse in Poland, regardless of specific differences between various discursive platforms, is its relatively critical position towards the Round Table talks. The Round Table is not regarded as an institution of national reconciliation where the divided parties decided to forget about past problems and grievances. In this discursive position, 1989 was not the outcome of the communists' efforts to dismantle their prerogatives and renounce their leading position in state and society. The predominant view is rather that the two sides had different views about the future of the country. As one right-wing politician put it: 'It is necessary to reject the legend which turns the Round Table into a myth where both sides, Solidarity and the authorities, are equally concerned and preoccupied with the urge to change Poland, and where both sides are given credit for bringing about democracy. I have no doubt that such was the intention of Solidarity, but not of the authorities of the Polish People's Republic'.¹⁴ Here we find not so much a fundamental critique of the Round Table, but rather an attempt to qualify the very positive image presented in post-communist historical narratives. Instead of unity, what is emphasised is the conflicting motives of the two sides. Solidarity was not interested in reforming the communist system. Rather, it wanted to create opportunities for the democratisation and marketisation of the country, even at the cost of some compromises necessary for the partial extension of the realm of freedom. When it comes to the intentions of the communists, they simply wanted to co-opt Solidarity and maintain power. For them, the Round Table was part of a bigger game, an 'elaborate legal-political construction' aimed at the retention and re-legitimisation of their power.¹⁵

Society, the third important stake-holder in this process, is represented as demobilised by martial law and exhausted by the extremely poor economic situation in the final years of socialism. The workers' strikes of 1988 are used as evidence of this demobilisation and the lack of revolutionary potential within the Polish people. These three basic elements of the situation, the opposition, the communists and society, between them determined the pace and shape of the Round Table talks. The

conclusion in this discursive position is that the evolutionary character of the breakthrough in Poland could not have been different. Regardless of the actual intentions of political elites and the balance of power between Solidarity and the authorities, the Round Table is assessed as an unambiguously positive event which enabled the bloodless transition to democracy. The Round Table is described as having triggered unexpected dynamics, ultimately leading to 'radical change' in the country's situation.¹⁶ It is accepted that not all opposition groups were represented at the Round Table, but the groupings and parties uncompromisingly rejecting talks with communists are deemed as 'marginal'. There is some emphasis put on the too narrow composition of the opposition forces which were allowed to take part in the Round Table talks and in the June 1989 elections under the auspices of Solidarity. Nevertheless, decisions on the composition of the Solidarity delegation were made by 'L. Walesa and his closest advisers themselves',¹⁷ without any interference from the communist secret services.

Generally speaking, the affirmative position rejects the idea of a conspiracy or the notion of a communist-led transition determined by the operational games of the secret services. In particular it dismisses the claim that Magdalenka was a place where a secret plot was hatched. The course of the negotiations was known to the public as the proceedings were broadcast on national television. Therefore behind-the-scene activities, even if they took place, were of limited importance and did not affect mainstream events. The predominant opinion in the affirmative discourse is that the Round Table should not be explained through strong cause and effect relations with outcomes known in advance by the actors involved. Neither should it be analysed as a detailed plan aimed at maximising the interests of the negotiating sides. Many decisions were reached spontaneously and issues appeared on the agenda as a result of unexpected turns of events rather than previously planned decisions. All in all, the overwhelming victory of the opposition in the June 1989 elections was beyond the imagination of both sides.¹⁸

Just as the Round Table was not a plot, neither was Magdalenka a place where it was possible to make deals. Thus the 'thick line' policy of Mazowiecki's government should not be treated as an implementation of arrangements aimed at securing a privileged position for the post-communists in the democratic polity. The soft approach towards communists and the lack of any attempts to hold representatives of the former regime to account was motivated not by bad intentions or hidden interests, but by the logic of political processes and the requirements of stabilising the new regime. The 'thick line' was constructed as a policy playing a two-fold function. First, it marked off communism from the new regime and shifted the burden of responsibility for Poland's current state onto the communist elites. Second, it was a formula which stressed

that former members of the communist party and allied parties 'were not going to be second class citizens'. This symbolic demarcation was aimed at preventing a re-consolidation of the communists based on their opposition to a common enemy. A communist backlash, it was argued, would make life difficult for the new government. Moreover, the 'thick line' conveyed an ethical message: that one cannot attack those with whom one had previously negotiated. Such an approach was perceived as appropriate for the new democratic conditions. Reckoning with the past was equated with the old Bolshevik mechanisms of political struggle based on revenge and aggression. Besides, radical solutions directed against the former communists were not possible due to the ambiguous status of the 1989 events. As there was no revolution or catharsis, any clear-cut decisions based on drawing a strong line between communism and anti-communism would violate the complicated historical reality and the entangled biographies of the leading protagonists. Any negative results of this soft policy towards the past (the high level of corruption, the penetration of state structures and the economy by the secret services, the destruction of secret police files, and so on), are presented as the unavoidable cost of a peaceful, negotiated transformation which was regarded as preferable to a violent extrication from communism.¹⁹

The positive, though qualified, assessment of the Round Table and the defence of the 'thick line' policy is accompanied by a consideration of the possible historical alternatives. Bloody conflict is viewed as having been a genuine possibility based on the assumption that permanent tensions between the communists and society could easily have created a civil war-like atmosphere, with both sides resorting to the use of force. In such a context the Round Table, Magdalenka and the 'thick line' are presented as the best possible solutions. Negative consequences are perceived as the necessary price which has to be paid for any kind of political decision.

Critical discourse

The second discursive position differs in its assessment of the 1989 events. The Round Table, including Magdalenka, are deemed positive and necessary moments in the contemporary history of Poland. What is wholeheartedly rejected and vehemently criticised is the 'thick line' policy of Mazowiecki's government. In comparison to the slightly ambivalent but generally affirmative attitude of the first discursive position, based on the assumption that the Round Table established a specific model of peaceful transition to democracy which Poles should be proud of, the second discursive position is much more ambivalent in its assessment. Although the Round Table is evaluated as a positive event which cannot be treated as a 'betrayal', its significance is limited to a brief historical moment.²⁰ Its role in the transformation of the polity is difficult to over-emphasise, but

it lost its relevance with the fall of the Berlin Wall.²¹ The fundamental parameters of the situation in 1989 are represented in a manner similar to the first discursive position. There are no illusions about the intentions of the communist incumbents: they strove to guarantee for themselves the best possible status in every respect and sought to strengthen their position by co-opting oppositional elites. The picture of Polish society is similar – demobilised, exhausted by the poor living conditions in the last phase of communism – and this is used to explain the diminished revolutionary potential of the 1988 strikes.²² The system had reached its limits, unable to satisfy the basic material needs of society. In such conditions an opportunity appeared to engage in Round Table talks, which for the opposition was a chance for partial political change.

The talks were not only represented as a short-term tactical solution. They were also portrayed as a prelude to the political-historical compromise between the Solidarity left and the communist forces which determined the path of transformation. The argument is that a step initially perceived as purely tactical by some opposition activists was allegedly treated by other oppositionists as a long-term arrangement. Such a division within the oppositional elites was underpinned by biographical similarities (for instance former membership in the communist party), a suspicious attitude towards right-wing groupings, and even ideological affinities shared by the Solidarity left and the communist party.²³ An ambivalent picture of the Round Table, serving to reveal internal tensions and differences among the Solidarity ranks, is accompanied by strong criticism directed first and foremost at the policy of the Mazowiecki government. The ‘thick line’ is deemed completely mistaken, at least after the fall of communism in other East European countries.²⁴ To be sure, before those events, the Round Table agreements had to be complied with. Communism still existed, the situation was ambiguous and the crucial ministries (interior and defence) were still controlled by the communists. However, whatever the original intentions of prime minister Mazowiecki, the ‘thick line’ engendered a policy which retained communist networks rooted in the pre-1989 past. It contributed to the reproduction of the privileged status of the communists and their left-wing allies, allowed the ‘propretisation of the *nomenklatura*’, prevented fundamental changes in public administration and led to popular apathy and the alienation of society from politics.²⁵ These negative processes and phenomena are responsible for the protracted transitional status of Poland and its hybrid character.

This discourse, however, stops short of blaming particular individuals. Instead, mistakes, a lack of full knowledge of the complexities of social reality, scarcity of resources, incompetence and other factors are used to explain what are perceived to be unwelcome outcomes. Such a set of premises narrows down what it is possible to say in this discursive

position. It is impossible to imply, for example, that the Round Table was a betrayal, at least in the literal sense of the word. Nor is it possible to conceive of Magdalenka as a plot which secured the future position of the (post-)communists. The thesis that there was a deal 'on capturing the position of power in exchange for property' is also rejected.²⁶ The propertisation of the *nomenklatura* was not Solidarity's fault. This process had already begun in January 1989, even before the Round Table talks had started. Moreover, the authorities did not control the composition of the Solidarity side, although the disintegration of the police state was inevitably associated with certain undercover activities, steering processes and operational games by the secret services. It is clear that the Round Table was not an entirely stage-managed spectacle in which the main parts were played by the communists and secret service collaborators. At least there is no evidence for that.

Accordingly, our three analysed categories are not represented as part of a linear chain with cause and effect relations between them, entirely determined by the intentions and interests of both sides. As Leszek Kaczyński said: 'I am not claiming that on 6 April 1989 the die was cast, that is to say, the Round Table itself brought solutions which inevitably produced outcomes we have to deal with now'.²⁷ As the transitional processes were multidimensional in nature, structural and personal determinants came into play. To put it bluntly, according to this discursive position, some oppositionists negotiating at the Round Table could have believed, for many reasons, that they were establishing a long-term balance of power, and so secured future positions for themselves and their partners. Such a perception of the situation could have been strengthened by the favourable negotiating atmosphere or even fraternisation based on the conscious activities of the secret services,²⁸ or past ideological and social bonds.²⁹ Moreover, the logic of the situation where the two antagonists started to talk, could produce the conviction that from an ethical point of view it would be inappropriate to punish those with whom one had negotiated. The political stance of actors involved in the Round Table talks could also have been induced by the fear of communism, felt especially by those who had experienced its worst phases. This is a factor believed to have been of great importance in the behaviour of certain politicians. It determined their cautiousness and reluctance to settle accounts. Other factors used to explain the oppositionists' activities and the 'thick line' policy include a lack of imagination, prejudices, political mistakes and the actions of the secret services. Altogether they narrowed down the range of political solutions which the leftist part of the Solidarity movement (in the terminology used in this position) could accept or even imagine.

The answer to the question of an alternative pertains mainly to the 'thick line' policy of the Mazowiecki government. The Round Table *per*

se, although it created a logic which resulted in an unnecessary fixation on compromise in the interim phase, is assessed as an event which had no better alternative at the time. Waiting for the inevitable decay of communism was not considered to be a reasonable option here, as no one foresaw at the time how rapidly the old system would collapse. Moreover, it could have caused further harm to the economy and destroyed, both internally and internationally, 'the myth of Solidarity' as an active agent in the transitional process.

In contrast to the Round Table, the 'thick line' policy faces radical criticism in this discursive position. As early as the autumn of 1989, it is suggested, in the changed political climate following the fall of the Berlin Wall, communism should have been 'attacked and finished off' in Poland.³⁰ That would have meant severing the Round Table agreement, banning the communist party, capturing the security apparatus, arresting high-ranking functionaries of the secret services and party, securing the archives of the Central Committee of the PZPR, the ministry of internal affairs and the ministry of national defence and, last but not least, immediately halting the propertisation of the *nomenklatura*.

Rejectionist discourse

Although the third discursive position might accept the proposed means of coming to terms with the communists, it is reluctant to accept the representation of the Round Table and Magdalenka contained in the second position. Despite some shared assumptions, a detailed analysis reveals different mechanisms of explanation, completely different conclusions and a different vision of alternative political scenarios.

In the rejectionist position, all three of the categories analysed here – Magdalenka, the Round Table and the 'thick line' – become factors that explain the entire transformation in Poland after 1989 in linear fashion. As in the previous discursive positions, there are no doubts here about the intentions of the communist side. The difference lies in their conflicting assessment of how far the path of transformation was actually determined by these intentions. The rejectionist discourse dismisses the view of the Round Table as an opportunity which extended the realm of freedom and paved the way to the democratisation and marketisation of the country. It is rather perceived as a chance for the communists to retain their power and influence. This obviously affects the definition of the situation in the entire transitional period. The maladies of transformation in the 1990s are explained by the events of the late 1980s. Behind-the-scene activities are dated back to the mid-1980s when the communists, with the help of the secret services, started to prepare the Round Table scenario, understood here as a 'formal agreement between the communists and the communist opposition'.³¹ The general aim of the entire operation was to retain

the essence of communism and the privileged position of communists. Although there is some disagreement over the methods used, there is no doubt about the ultimate intention: 'defence of the communists against the Catholic nation',³² the creation of a safety net providing an opportunity to experiment with multiple variants of socialism, or 'preventing the degradation of the social position of the former *nomenklatura*'.³³

The second important agent of change, the opposition, was also entirely controlled and even created by the power holders from as early as the 1970s. Even the 'first Solidarity' period in 1980–81 is presented in a populist manner as a revolutionised nation controlled by left-wing oppositional elites who were partially connected with the communist secret services. The fact that many oppositionists had a communist episode in their biographies is used in the most radical variant of this position, which almost completely denies any difference between the two sides. Instead, the Round Table is presented as the outcome of a deal between different factions of the communist party, or even between the communists and the Trotskyists.³⁴ Nevertheless, the more typical approach is not to suggest a complete identification between the two sides, but, rather, to question and undermine the differences between them, often in a revelatory tone. It is pointed out that oppositionists had been active members of the communist party or that they were ideologically committed to the same leftist ideas as the communists. Another argument is that the close cooperation between them was possible due to their alienation from Polish society. Hence it was not only a shared biography and ideology, but also a fear of the loss of power and privileges that pushed them into negotiations. In contrast to the second, critical position, however, these episodes are not interpreted within the framework of an evolving set of circumstances whose outcome was unpredictable, but rather as evidence of full communist control over the situation. This thesis, constituting the essence of the rejectionist position, is easy to reconcile with the vision of a plot between the 'pinks' and the reds'.³⁵

Society is represented ambiguously. On the one hand, emphasis is put on the growing wave of social discontent expressed in the strikes of 1988, yet on the other hand these protests are envisioned as having been triggered by the secret services.³⁶ Their alleged aim was to give Solidarity an opportunity to present itself as a legitimate force to negotiate with, due to its ability to call off the strikes. Thus, the ambiguous assessment of social actions, as both spontaneous and controlled, makes it possible to attack both power holders and opposition. Romantic, martyrological and insurrectional allusions and tones are used, and the communist side is demonised and attributed with the ability to control anything that confronted it. The Round Table *per se* is consistently represented as a kind of a blueprint or a game staged in the smallest of details. Generally speaking, it is described

as 'an agreement between the communist *nomenklatura* with part of the Solidarity elite'.³⁷ The two important premises of radical anti-communism, the theses regarding the permanent, unchanging essence of communism and its tendency to hide the truth about itself, are thus clearly evident in these representations of the Round Table, Magdalenka and the 'thick line'. The actual function of the Round Table and the secret forum of Magdalenka, and consequently of the 'thick line' policy, was to secure the status quo despite changes in its external manifestations. The Round Table provided the symbolic facade, the stage on which the spectacle of negotiations was acted out. According to the rejectionist position, it was nothing but a show aimed at giving the impression of tough bargaining between two antagonistic sides trying to maximise their interests. Accordingly, Magdalenka is perceived as the behind-the-scenes realm – a place where the most important decisions were made. It helped to sustain communism in the country. As communism always tended to use manipulation, and revealed the truth about itself reluctantly and only on extraordinary occasions, its transformation also required mystification.

The Round Table is depicted through the metaphor of the theatre – screenplay, actors, performance. There are also expressions suggesting its instrumental character ('the political masterstroke'),³⁸ its fraudulent status ('the great mystification'),³⁹ or its remoteness from society and anti-national character ('the betrayal').⁴⁰ Magdalenka was a forum of secret meetings, although the discourse does not adduce any evidence to prove that; subsequent events, negatively assessed and treated as direct outcomes of the Round Table and Magdalenka, are considered to be sufficient proof.

The 'thick line' policy of the Mazowiecki government is seen as the best evidence of secret deals. Whereas the previous critical discourse maintains a distinction between the intentions of Mazowiecki and the actual policy of his government, here this division is systematically called into question. The prime minister is 'guilty', because he 'inaugurated', 'ordered' or 'announced' the 'thick line' policy.⁴¹ It is argued that the 'thick line', as the outcome of negotiations between the communists and a group of oppositionists, had many adverse consequences. First, at the axiological level, the boundary between good and evil was blurred as the communists were not held responsible for their actions. Second, at the political and legal level the major issues are the refusal to let go of left-wing control of the state, the inability to deal with the past, the continuation of old networks and structures in the new regime and the delay of necessary reforms. Third, the source of problems at the economic level lies in the proprietisation of the *nomenklatura* and creation of political capitalism serving the interests of the functionaries of the old regime.⁴²

The rejectionists' unambiguous critique and resolute repudiation of the

Round Table, Magdalenka and the 'thick line' is based on their vision of specific alternatives which, if implemented, would have completely changed the situation. When it comes to the Round Table, it is argued that the oppositional side should have waited, as the system itself was gradually declining. The more difficult the position of the communists, the more the opposition could have gained.⁴³ Besides, in the context of the regime's downfall, its functionaries would have had to yield to the demands of a spontaneously created opposition, not an opposition created by the regime itself. In this scenario, the opposition would have captured power earlier and without the personal and structural burden imposed by informal relations with representatives of the old regime. Symbolically, the situation would also have been better as the victory over communism would have been clear and there would have been no attempts at cooption by the regime which put the opposition in an ambiguous situation. It is argued that the haste of the Solidarity left, its refusal to wait for the regime to crumble from within, slowed down the democratic process and postponed the first fully democratic elections until 1991. This alternative scenario is supplemented by the idea of the ceremonialisation of the end of communism and the inauguration of the new system. A performative act by state officials symbolically marking off the old order would have drawn a clear line at the level of political elites and social consciousness.

Conclusions

The characteristic feature of all three discursive positions discussed in this chapter is their reluctance to use the categories of the Round Table, Magdalenka and the 'thick line' as part of a legitimising formula for the events of 1989. The critical and rejectionist positions use them, rather, to delegitimise political opponents and to diminish their contribution to the processes denoted by these categories. Ambiguity is another important property of the representation of 1989, commonly also the ambiguity of the Round Table's representation, which not only serves to emphasise the complexities of the historical situation (affirmative discourse), but also can be used for the delegitimation of former Solidarity negotiators. According to the affirmative position, this ambiguity was unavoidable due to the lack of revolutionary enthusiasm among the general population in 1988–89. The critical and rejectionist discursive positions emphasise that it was the task of the elites to initiate a breakthrough. Such an attempt would have changed the situation and affected the collective consciousness even without a revolutionary social context. The second thread, common to all the aforementioned variants of right-wing discourse, claims that contrary to the assumptions shared by leftist post-communist historiography, it was not the democratic spirit that induced the communists to

start negotiations but rather cold calculation aimed at sustaining power through the co-opting of oppositional forces. These two themes are the only similarities between the three positions.

There are many differences that determine the boundaries between the discourses. They pertain to the question of the representativeness of the Solidarity delegation which conducted the Round Table negotiations with the communists, the significance of the secret talks at Magdalenska, the relationship between overt and behind-the-scene activities, the question of the agency of the opposition camp and its ability to act independently of the communist state, and the issue of alternative strategies or outcomes. The origins of these divisions can be traced to the beginning of the 1990s and ascribed to the 'war at the top' when the Solidarity movement started to splinter into two camps. The first, favourable to the actual course of democratisation and the shape of the Third Polish Republic, positively assessed the Round Table and treated rumours about the 'plot' at Magdalenska as an intellectual distortion; it recognised the 'thick line' policy as a historical necessity. The second camp was highly critical of the outcomes of the Round Table and Magdalenska and argued strongly against the 'thick line' as a measure which impeded necessary changes and caused the hybrid status of the Third Polish Republic. It is not difficult to find strong affinities between the two camps and discursive positions of the right-wing parties after 1989; the rejectionist position discussed here can be perceived as the radicalisation of opinion formulated by the second camp. Yet, the radicalism of the rejectionist position, the individualist interpretation of political processes and the tendency towards conspiracy theories – features developed throughout the 1990s – introduced a qualitative difference between this position and the second (critical) discourse.

The emergence of two camps within the opposition movement affected the structure of public discourse in subsequent years, and the construction of 1989 in Polish political discourse has been strongly determined by these early divisions. Social scientists using discourse analysis have often drawn attention to the high degree of ritualisation involved in the creation of these camps; categories, key words, motives, themes and constructions have been resistant to change and have been repeated in almost unchanged shape since the beginning of the 1990s. As 1989 is perceived and represented as one of the major determinants of the subsequent course of events in the Third Republic, its significance stems from the current divisions over the definition of social and political reality. In this sense, 1989 and its constitutive events should be perceived as a current problem rather than a thing of the past.

Notes

- 1 M. Castle, *Triggering Communism's Collapse: Perceptions and Power in Poland's Transition* (Lanham, 2003), p. 222.
- 2 M. Wenzel, 'Solidarity and Akcja Wyborcza "Solidarnosc": An Attempt at Reviving the Legend', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 31, no. 2 (1998), pp. 139–56.
- 3 'Prezydent i premier w Gdańsku, ale osobno', *Rzeczpospolita*, www.rp.pl/artykul/304373,315202_Prezydent-i-premier-w-Gdansk-u-ale-osobno.html (last accessed 15 September 2010).
- 4 D. Dabert, *Mowa kontrolowana: Szkice o języku publicznym w Polsce po 1989 roku* (Poznań, 2003), p. 29.
- 5 A. Dudek, *Reglamentowana rewolucja: Rozkład dyktatury komunistycznej w Polsce 1988–1990* (Kraków, 2004).
- 6 Several historians have concluded that so far no historical source has been found which upholds the plot thesis. See 'Mity polskie, rozmowa z A. Paczkowskim', *Wprost*, vol. 27 December 1998, p. 21; K. Trembicka, 'Okrągły Stół w Polsce – mity i stereotypy', *Studia Polityczne*, vol. 15 (2004), p. 101; W. Roszkowski, *Do horyzontu i z powrotem. Eseje o historii i współczesności* (Kraków, 2000), p. 132.
- 7 Z. Domarańczyk, *100 dni Mazowieckiego* (Warsaw, 1990), pp. 106, 108.
- 8 Such was the interpretation of the prime minister, the intellectuals who supported him, and even critical historians. See 'To był rząd zasadniczej zmiany, rozmowa z T. Mazowieckim', *Więź*, vol. 3 (1997), p. 18; J. Jedlicki, 'Wariacje na temat grubej linii', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 26–27 April 1997, p. 8.
- 9 Jan Kubik and Amy Lynch, 'The Original Sin of Poland's Third Republic: Discounting "Solidarity" and its Consequences for Political Reconciliation', *Polish Sociological Review*, vol. 1 (2006), pp. 9–38.
- 10 Castle, *Triggering*, p. 223.
- 11 D. Howarth, 'Discourse Theory and Political Analysis', in E. Scarbrough and E. Tanenbaum (eds), *Research Strategies in the Social Sciences: A Guide to New Approaches* (Oxford, 1998).
- 12 D. Howarth and Y. Stavrakakis, 'Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis', in D. Howarth, A. Norval and Y. Stavrakakis (eds), *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis* (Manchester, 2000), p. 7.
- 13 P. Bourdieu, 'The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups', *Theory and Society*, vol. 6 (1985), p. 729. See also P. Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Power', in Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford, 1990), p. 135.
- 14 Aleksander Hall's speech at the conference 'Communism's Negotiated Collapse: The Polish Round Table Talks. Ten Years Later', www.umich.edu/~iinet/PolishRoundTable/ (last accessed 20 May 2005).

- 15 A. Hall, 'Bronię Okrągłego Stołu', *Gazeta Wyborcza* 15–16 March 1997, p. 16; R. Matyja, 'Przebudowa państwa', *Polityka Polska*, vol. 1 (1990), p. 19.
- 16 *Spór o Polskę, z A. Hallem rozmawia E. Polak i M. Kobzdej* (Warsaw, 1993), p. 16.
- 17 Hall's speech at the conference 'Communism's Negotiated Collapse'.
- 18 *Spór o Polskę*, p. 37.
- 19 A. Hall, *Jaka Polska?* (Warsaw, 2004), p. 80.
- 20 'Solidarność i lojalność, z L. Kaczyńskim rozmawia M. Łopiński', *Tygodnik Solidarność*, vol. 6 (1999), p. 6.
- 21 See L. Dorn, 'Shorthand notes from 45th parliamentary session of III Term of Polish Sejm, 4 March 1999', www.sejm.gov.pl (last accessed 20 May 2005).
- 22 'Jaruzelski wołał Wałęsę, rozmowa z J. Kaczyńskim', *Gazeta Polska*, vol. 6 (1999), p. 8.
- 23 J. Kaczyński, 'Kogo nie zamyka się do więzienia', *Gazeta Polska*, vol. 35 (1996), p. 5; '"S" strategicznym partnerem ROP-u, rozmowa z J. Kurskim', *Myśl Polska*, vol. 50 (1996), p. 6.
- 24 'Zabrakło wyobraźni w tej grze, z L. Kaczyńskim rozmawia A.R. Potocki', *Życie*, 7 February 1999, p. 14.
- 25 J. Kurski, 'Rok Mazowieckiego', in P. Śpiewak (ed.), *Spór o Polskę 1989–1999: Wybór tekstów prasowych* (Warsaw, 2000), pp. 246–8. The term 'propertisation of the *nomenklatura*' refers to the enrichment of party apparatchiks through the privatisation of former state-owned companies. For more on this issue, see A. Zybertowicz and M. Los, *Privatizing the Police State: The Case of Poland* (Basingstoke, 2000).
- 26 Leszek Kaczyński's speech at the conference 'Communism's Negotiated Collapse: The Polish Round Table Talks. Ten Years Later', available at: www.umich.edu/~iinet/PolishRoundTable/ (last accessed 20 May 2005).
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 'Legenda Okrągłego Stołu, z Wiesławem Chrzanowskim rozmawia R. Krasowski', *Życie*, 11 May 1999, p. 108.
- 29 *Pół wieku polityki czyli rzecz o obronie czynnej, z W. Chrzanowskim rozmawiali P. Mierecki, B. Kiernicki* (Warsaw, 1997), p. 432.
- 30 *Czas na zmiany – z Jarosławem Kaczyńskim rozmawiają P. Bichniewicz, P.M. Rudnicki* (Warsaw, 1993), p. 26.
- 31 A. Glapiński, 'Ukryta władza', *Gazeta Polska*, vol. 6 (1996), p. 11.
- 32 S. Małkowski, 'Wokół „okrągłego stołu” – w rocznicę zdrady', *Nasza Polska*, vol. 9 (1997), p. 4.
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- 34 J. Olszewski, 'Mamy plan kształtowania Polski XXI wieku – przemówienie wygłoszone podczas konferencji RdR w dniu 24 stycznia

- 1993', in *Ruch dla Rzeczypospolitej. Materiały programowe* (Warsaw, 1993), p. 8; P. Jakucki, 'Zwycięzcy?', *Nasza Polska*, vol. 23 (1999), p. 1.
- 35 J. M. Jackowski, *Bitwa o Polskę* (Warsaw, 1993), p. 22.
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- 38 P. Bączek, 'Jak majstrowano Okrągły Stół', *Gazeta Polska* 30 (1995), pp. 1, 2, 9, 10, 11, 12.
- 39 P. Bączek, 'Wielka mistyfikacja', *Głos* 64 (1999), pp. 12–15.
- 40 A. Macierewicz, 'Okrągły Stół czy zdrada narodowa?', *Głos*, vol. 25 (1999), pp. 8–9.
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- 42 P. Jakucki, 'Kanciasty stół', *Nasza Polska*, vol. 6 (1999), p. 1.
- 43 For the opinions of J. Olszewski and A. Macierewicz on this issue, see S. M. Królak, 'Czy istniała alternatywa dla "okrągłego stołu"?', in A. Dudek (ed.), *"Solidarność" a wychodzenie Polski z komunizmu: Studia i artykuły z okazji XV rocznicy powstania NSZZ "Solidarność"* (Gdańsk, 1995), pp. 118–22.

From the ‘thirst for change’ and ‘hunger for truth’ to a ‘revolution that hardly happened’: public protests and reconstructions of the past in Bulgaria in the 1990s

Nikolai Vukov

Having been an object of enhanced public interest and media attention, the twentieth anniversary of the political changes in Central and Eastern Europe was one of the major events of 2009 and was a frequent occasion for ceremonies, rituals and commemorative acts. Celebrations of the anniversary of the end of the communist regimes (and particularly those marking the fall of the Berlin Wall) took place in all the main cities of Europe – interestingly enough, in some states of Western Europe the festivities were on a significantly larger scale than in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Alongside the political euphoria and the contested nature of the events of 1989–90 in post-socialist societies, the anniversary of the changes was also an opportunity to revisit memories and experiences of the communist period and to reconsider some of the interpretations of that era which had emerged since 1989. Public events and publications dealing with protests and demonstrations before and after the changes, and with political movements and dissident organisations, appeared in many countries of Europe and the USA. The result was the emergence of new analytical approaches, both to the political changes themselves and to the sensitive issue of representation and interpretation of the entire communist period from 1944 onwards.

A major point of contention in interpreting the political changes of 1989 is the lack of agreement over terminology. While in most Eastern European countries, these events are rightly termed ‘revolutions’ – a semantic assertion that has also shaped their subsequent interpretation – for most Bulgarians, this is not the right word to define their experiences of 1989. Although protests (by dissidents, environmental activists and representatives of ethnic and religious minorities) indeed occurred in the

months preceding 10 November 1989, they bore no direct connection to the events of that day. Seizing the initiative itself, the party leadership in fact took preemptive action to avoid a situation similar to Romania, removing Todor Zhivkov from his position as General Secretary at a specially convened party plenum and thereby depriving the public of an opportunity to overturn the existing political system from the bottom up. On the positive side, violence and mass casualties were averted. However, this specificity in the Bulgarian exit from the communist period also contributed much to the general perception of regime change as having not actually occurred, as having been enacted 'from above', or as having been 'negotiated' in secret, enabling the former communist elite to establish new positions of power within the post-communist state and economy. This influenced not only the interpretation of the events in November 1989, but also the overall confusion over whether change 'had' or 'had not happened', resulting in several attempts during the 1990s to carry out public acts that would at least symbolically embody the idea of a 'radical transformation'.

The current chapter will shed light on a specific aspect of the political changes in Bulgaria, particularly the situation where a 'revolution' was the envisioned means of overturning communist rule, and yet – due to a variety of circumstances – no such 'revolution' occurred, both in 1989 and in the years thereafter. It will also explore the idea of 'revolutionary transformation' as expressed in public meetings and popular demonstrations in the 1990s, arguing that attempts to involve the people in defining and giving meaning to 'emergent and ultimate' changes proved difficult and elusive. Among the various examples to illustrate this point, I will focus on three events in particular: Zhivkov's removal from office on 10 November 1989; the arson attack on the Party House in the Bulgarian capital in August 1990; and the destruction of the mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov in Sofia in 1999. The symbolic acts that accompanied these events are especially interesting in contexts which, despite their 'revolutionary' potential, did not lead to a 'revolution', but rather to an exclusion of the people and the appropriation of its supposed aspirations by different parties, most notably the 'reds' (socialists) and the 'blues' (the democratic opposition), colours which still mark the major divisions in Bulgarian politics today. Thus, through exploring the notion of the 'un-happened' revolution in Bulgaria and the associated metaphors of a 'thirst for a change' and a 'hunger for truth', the chapter will shed light on the overall discontent in Bulgaria with the course of the post-communist transition and the problematic memory about a decade that has gradually displaced the communist period as a realm of the 'recent past'.

The symbolic day of the political changes: 10 November 1989

Zhivkov's removal from power on 10 November 1989, which is still perceived as the first actual sign of the political changes in Bulgaria, took place at the same time as the fall of the Berlin Wall, but unlike the latter event, it is still uncertain what exactly its meaning was: whether it was a *coup d'état* carried out by members of the party circle around Zhivkov, whether it was Zhivkov's own decision to retire, or whether some ultra-conservatives in the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) sought a reversal of *perestroika* which then backfired on them. Ordinary Bulgarians learned about the changes from the television, which showed Zhivkov's confused face at the official announcement of his retirement, as if he could not believe what was happening. Despite the attempts that Zhivkov made to keep at least the position of head of state, the crowds were already celebrating his departure in the streets and there was hardly anything he could have done to reverse the course of events. Taking place in parallel with public protests and political changes in other Eastern European countries, the events of 10 November in Bulgaria finally put paid to the pretence that *perestroika* could be avoided, or rather that events could be managed so that no political change would actually occur.¹ The manoeuvring in the higher ranks of the party also marked the attempts of the BCP 'to change without actually changing' and to respond to the demands of the political situation by carrying out an internal transformation in order to retain power in a 'regenerated' way.

Not surprisingly, the removal of Zhivkov failed to satisfy the 'thirst for change' and 'hunger for truth' which had been mounting in Bulgarian society over the years. The decades of double-talk and public mistrust had created both a sense of disbelief in what was being said in the party-controlled media and an expectation that eventually the demand for 'speaking out the truth' would have to be met. In fact, much of the oppositional activity in 1988 and 1989 bore the explicit hallmarks of a desire to learn the truth and a determination that those who spoke out honestly should not be punished. The creation of the Democratic League for the Protection of Human Rights in November 1988 was triggered in response to the regime's persecution of the Bulgarian Turks (and Muslims in general), following the demand that they adopt Slavic names. The unprecedented wave of hunger strikes and peaceful processions in the name of the protection of human rights in May 1989 (both by Turks and dissidents) caused much damage to the reputation of the communist system, as Elena Simeonova also suggests in her chapter, although the government still refused to reverse its policy or apologise to the Muslim victims. The trade union *Podkrepa* (Support), which was established in early 1989 by Dr Konstantin Trenchev, following the example of Lech Wałęsa and Solidarity in Poland,

aimed to subsume a large part of the communist trade unions and to turn them into a democratic organisation for the working people in Bulgaria. Although lacking official registration (due to the fact that the Bulgarian legal system prohibited the existence of alternative workers' organisations), *Podkrepa* gained enormous popularity among ordinary wage earners, as it voiced many problems related to employment legislation which had been neglected for years by the state-controlled labour movement.

A major role in mobilising these new forms of protest was played by the ecological committee in the town of Russe, as Simeonova shows. Although several of its meetings were dispersed and its members were subjected to party repressions, the Russe committee and the subsequent formation of *Ecoglasnost* as a new pressure group on 3 November 1989 also helped to speed up the decisions taken at the party plenum on 9–10 November 1989. The calling of the plenum and the removal of Zhivkov from power was a means for the regime to control the wave of popular discontent and to halt the escalation of 'revolutionary' demands, thus preventing the toppling of communist rule. As such, despite the initial euphoria surrounding Zhivkov's departure and the hopes for real change that this engendered, the events of 10 November actually meant that the revolution was 'stolen' from under its own feet, and a false idea was presented that it had 'already happened'. In particular, legitimate doubts soon arose about the role of communist cadres in staging the whole thing. Thus, in spite of the reputation that 10 November gained as a symbolic day of change, the years that followed were characterised by a lack of firm understanding as to what actually had been transformed, and by the added complication that the only thing that seemed to have changed on that day was the BCP itself.

Despite attempts to prevent further upheaval, events followed at rapid speed. A week later, Zhivkov lost his position as head of state and was replaced by Petar Mladenov (the pro-Gorbachev former minister of foreign affairs), who became president; clause 271, which forbade any criticism of the regime, was removed from the penal code; and on 18 November the so-called 'informal organisations' *Podkrepa* and *Ecoglasnost* held their first free meeting in front of the Alexander Nevski Cathedral in Sofia. At the beginning of December, the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) was created as an alliance of anti-communist parties, and a meeting in front of the National Parliament demanded the immediate abolition of article 1 of the constitution, which guaranteed the leading role of the BCP in the state. It was at this meeting that Mladenov used the phrase 'The tanks should come!' in response to anti-government demonstrations, which ultimately led to his resignation as president in July 1990 and to the election of a UDF candidate, Zhelyu Zhelev, to replace him. Meanwhile, on 29 December 1989 the Politburo of the BCP agreed to restore the right of Bulgarian Turks to use their own names rather than the Slav names that had been

forced upon them, and on 15 January 1990 the Bulgarian parliament voted to abolish article 1. The early days of 1990 were marked by Round Tables with representatives from the opposition and the ruling body of the communist party. These Round Table negotiations signalled the beginning of the peaceful transition to democratic rule, paved the way to the first multi-party parliamentary elections (won in June by the newly renamed Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), but disputed by the UDF) and then to the election of the first democratic president, Zhelev, on 1 August. In the summer of 1990, a tent camp 'City of Truth' was formed in the centre of the capital, with the purpose of voicing protest against the continued domination of state affairs and public life by former communists. At that time the economic crisis first began to make itself felt with basic products disappearing from the markets and by the end of the year the approaching financial collapse, coupled with the pressure of strikes from university students, led to the resignation of the BSP government of Andrei Lukanov and the formation of the first non-communist administration in Bulgaria since the 1940s.

Although all of these developments represented the gradual disintegration of the once all-powerful party-state, they were also in a way responses to the lack of 'one' crucial event symbolising the overthrow of the regime and/or a single instance of the crowds taking power on their own initiative. Despite marking the dividing line between the communist system and its post-communist aftermath, Zhivkov's replacement on 10 November 1989 could in no way satisfy the public desire for a revolution by popular initiative, nor could it dispel the overall impression about its being a well-planned attempt to prevent any further change. Already in the days that immediately followed this date, there were widespread rumours that the senior party members who had enacted Zhivkov's removal had been involved in preliminary conversations and negotiations with the Soviet Union. In other words, Zhivkov's dismissal was a palace coup undertaken at Moscow's bequest. However, this staged transformation could not prevent the eruption of public energy and the mass protests, demonstrations and meetings of the opposition in the days and months after 10 November. Despite their scale and diverse forms (street processions, demonstrations, meetings, students' and workers' strikes, and so on), none of them were equal to a 'revolutionary act' as they all took place in support of political changes within a system that had already started disintegrating and against a ruling power that had already collapsed.²

If there was a 'revolution' in these events, it was a revolution dispersed and multiplied in a series of smaller instances, each of them reflecting the abrupt changes of 10 November, each gathering support from crowds in pursuit of a radical break with the communist past, and each lacking sufficient force to turn into the 'major event' that would symbolise the

complete and ultimate transformation of state and society. In fact, despite their overall desire to catalyse public energies and to bring about thorough and irreversible changes, none of the public activities in the early 1990s actively embraced the term 'revolution'. The main reason for this was the misuse of the word 'revolution' throughout the communist era. Aside from the Great October Revolution, which held a special position in the communist pantheon of world events, another important date was 9 September 1944, the day on which Soviet troops first entered Bulgarian territory and a new Fatherland Front government was established, thus marking the beginning of socialism in the country. Despite its problematic meanings (conflating the external 'liberation' with the role of internal partisans and communist activists in bringing about a coup d'état), the date was firmly ensconced as a 'revolution' in communist party rhetoric after 1971, when the former terms *narodno vŭstanie* (popular uprising) and *antifashistko vŭstanie* (anti-fascist uprising) were abandoned in favour of *sotsialisticheska revolyutsiya* (socialist revolution).³ This new terminological direction was linked with the greater emphasis placed on Zhivkov's participation in the 1944 coup and with the claim that he was a major player in its successful organisation, as reflected in numerous books, films and propaganda materials in the 1970s and 1980s. To apply the term 'revolution' to the events of 1989–90 meant to raise direct associations with the debased language of the communist era and thus to deprive the new course of events after the end of the communist rule of any real meaning. What appeared more important in the first months after the changes was to discuss topics that were previously wrapped in silence and to satisfy the 'hunger for truth' that had already gained momentum in Bulgarian society both as a metaphor and as a major social issue.

The 'hunger for truth' as a motor of changes

Already in the first days after Zhivkov's removal there was a widespread insistence on revealing the 'truth' about the recent past, and on the importance of this process for carrying out political transformations. Stirred by the protests and demonstrations, the 'hunger for truth' found expression in the discussion of a variety of issues previously hidden from public attention, such as the show trials and purges in the first decade of the communist regime; the hounding of the democratic opposition and the persecution of its leaders; the suppression of dissent; the establishment of labour camps and the internment of both political opponents and ordinary people.⁴ The emergence of these events and figures in public discourse occurred in the context of heightened popular sensitivity to the issues of recent history, and was often a direct reflection of the new surge of civic energies. In response to this, various incriminating materials were

disclosed and published in the first years after the changes, including documents relating to the establishment of communist power, the minutes of key Politburo meetings, and the organisation of the state security system and its sixth (secret police) department.⁵ The first months of the changes stirred enormous interest in the early years of communist rule and especially in the terror, which was organised by the so-called People's Court and targeted people involved in political activities before and during the Second World War, as well as members of their families, and/or entirely innocent individuals. Sympathy for the people who suffered in these events was systematically voiced in the first public meetings and demonstrations after 10 November 1989, and became the focal point for the formation of a 'community of mourners' (K. Verdery) which sought retribution and public recognition of their plight.⁶ As documentation regarding the activities of the People's Court was in many cases still missing or barred to public access, the demand for an acknowledgement of these deaths and for the disclosure of the truth surrounding them recurred in political meetings organised by the democratic opposition until the late 1990s and in some respects has continued to resonate in public discourse to the present day.

The pressure for disclosing the truth about events in recent history did not end with the terror used in the establishment of communist rule in 1944. A special focus of attention was the crushing of the democratic opposition after 1944 and the persecution and murder of major figures, such as Nikola Petkov and G. M. Dimitrov, the leaders of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union.⁷ Just weeks after the changes, the long-suppressed silence around these events was broken both in publicly distributed proclamations, and in artistic form, such as plays, novels and documentaries, which sought to reveal the path to establishing one-party rule in Bulgaria. The reformation of the agricultural union and the naming of one of its branches after Nikola Petkov also played a role in the creation of new interpretations of post-war history in opposition to the previously unchallengeable communist master narrative. The most serious blow, however, was related to disclosures about the communist labour camps, where (in some cases until the 1980s) people were sent for punishment with heavy sentences, either for expressing their opposition to or discontent with the regime, or because of their failure to carry out in full orders issued by the communist state.⁸ During Zhivkov's rule there were dozens of camps across the country (Belene, Bogdanov dol, Skravena, Lovech and so on), where not only anti-communists and dissidents were imprisoned and sometimes died, but also many young men and women whose only 'crime' was that they were influenced by western lifestyles, music and clothing. Information about the camps was known during communist times, but was shared only in secret and that is why speaking about this practice after the many years of silence had such significance for Bulgarian society and nurtured public

awareness of long-concealed facts. The existence of numerous smaller and larger size camps, the appalling conditions there, and the heart-rendering testimonies of survivors about torture and deaths, seized Bulgarian society and for several months became a key point in interpreting and depicting the recent past.

A peak in public sensitivity surrounding this issue came in June 1990 when the UDF decided to use it in its election campaign, preparing a poster with a map of Bulgaria covered with black skulls at the places where communist camps allegedly existed. The poster was devised by the French communications expert Jacques Séguéla, but it did not play well for the UDF at the first democratic elections and indeed put off some of its more hesitant supporters. Although on various occasions communist functionaries tried to claim that some of the camps did not exist or that information about them was exaggerated, they were proved wrong by people who had spent part of their lives there and by the published testimonies which continued to appear during the 1990s. Still, despite the many publications about the camps and the testimonies of the victims, no official proclamation was made about them in the 1990s, and no attempt was made to verify personal accounts or to investigate the perpetrators. In 1993 the so-called 'camps of death' became part of the prosecution case being prepared against Zhivkov, but – as with the many other criminal investigations against him – this particular line of enquiry was closed again, and with his death in 1998, terminated once and for all.

It is interesting to note that, soon after the removal of Zhivkov, the communist party itself undertook a re-evaluation of its own past in the interests of what was considered historical and political justice. Aside from the renaming of the party itself on 3 April 1990 – from the BCP to the BSP – an important aspect of the party's new image was its effort to rehabilitate former functionaries who had fallen victim to purges before and during Zhivkov's rule. The persons affected here included members of partisan groups and anti-fascist units during the war who were refused recognition due to their competition with the group of the party leader, the 'Chavdar' partisan unit; members of the Stalinist generation or figures involved in the politics of the 1940s and 1950s who fell out of favour with Zhivkov over the years; figures who were communist by conviction but who did not approve of his version of communist rule, and so on. At various meetings and political gatherings organised mainly by the BCP/BSP, calls to rehabilitate some of the party activists of the communist period received strong backing and nurtured the belief that the party itself was undergoing a process which would put it back on a 'pure' communist track. In addition to the notorious case of the prominent partisan and heroine of the anti-fascist movement, Yordanka Chankova, whose husband was among those purged during the de-stalinisation campaign of the

1950s, a major focus of attention in late 1989 and the early 1990s was Traicho Kostov, who had been one of the leading figures in the BCP after the war and a vice-premier in several governments before he was sentenced to death in a show trial in 1949.⁹ The execution of Traicho Kostov was commemorated in ceremonies organised by the BSP after 1989, and he was held up as one of the most prominent and respected leaders of the Bulgarian Workers' Party (and later, the Communist Party). What usually remained unmentioned in these commemorative events was that Kostov himself was implicated in many of the political murders in the first months after 9 September 1944, and in particular participated in the organisation of the notorious People's Court, which sentenced 2,680 Bulgarians to death for their participation in political activities during the inter-war and wartime periods.¹⁰ While gradually Kostov's reputation was tarnished due to his association with many crimes committed during the establishment of communist rule, initially he was celebrated as a victim of the Stalinist purges that took place in most of the Eastern European countries in the late 1940s and early 1950s.¹¹

The different emphases in reconstructing past events as an alternative to the historical narrative maintained by the previous regime revealed a point of critical divergence between BSP supporters and members of the opposition, a division which remains until today but was at its height during the 1990s. The contrasting attitudes towards the past and the different approaches to its revision and reinterpretation had a direct impact on the nature of the transition, as well as on the scope of political changes that were undertaken. Whereas for the members of the opposition parties, the events of 10 November 1989 were merely a precursor for the real changes that had to be carried out, the position of the socialists was that 10 November was a decisive step in the transformation of the country and that subsequent changes were to proceed in a 'gradual', rather than abrupt, way. This again placed the notion of 'revolution' in the spotlight, as for the democratic opposition, the revolution had not actually occurred and all the various protest meetings of the 1990s were to compensate for this omission. In contrast, for supporters of the BSP the 'revolution' had already taken place and any further acts of protest were to be condemned as a non-constitutional and 'counter-democratic' way of imposing change. The debates on how the post-communist transition needed to proceed – abruptly or smoothly – marked most of the public discussions in the 1990s, discussions which also took place against the background of the frequent changes of governments that occurred in that decade. The alternative paths between an immediate act or a protracted metamorphosis also framed the two most important symbolic events in the first ten years of the post-communist period – the arson on the Party House in 1990 and the destruction of the Dimitrov mausoleum in the centre of the Bulgarian capital in 1999.

The fire in the party house, 1990

Although several other public events in the early 1990s testified to an unbridgeable gap between the ‘reds’ (socialists) and ‘blues’ (the UDF and their allies), the point of rupture and lack of reconciliation was symbolised by an episode which for many Bulgarians became a substitute for the ‘un-happened revolution’ of 1989: the fire in the Party House in Sofia in August 1990. The huge stone-wall building was erected in the Stalinist period and served as the main headquarters of the BCP, where most important state decisions during communist times were taken. While from the outside the Party House conveyed an impression of endurance and strength, inside it was a complex system of offices and underground passages linking it to several other buildings in the square, among them the council of ministers and the mausoleum of the Bulgarian communist Georgi Dimitrov. The building was topped by a huge five-pointed star and was the focal point of military parades and processions on state holidays throughout the late 1980s. The assault on the Party House in August 1990 was set in motion by a decision of the Bulgarian parliament to remove all symbols of communist power from public buildings. Although the supreme council of the BSP agreed to remove the red star from the Party House, it failed to carry out this undertaking, thus precipitating acts of protests around the building. An escalation of these protests took place in the night of 26–7 August 1990, when Plamen Stanchev, a member of the movement ‘Initiative for Civic Discontent’, warned that he would set himself on fire if the red star remained on top of the Party House. After attempting to dissuade him, the head of the trade union organisation *Podkrepa*, Dr Trenchev, issued a warning that the building would be stormed unless the star and the red banner were taken down within an hour. Despite the president’s radio appeal to all political forces to refrain from violence, the nearby club of the BSP was attacked and later that night flames were visible from within the Party House itself. The fire was prevented from spreading by early in the morning, but around 40 rooms were burned down completely. There were no human victims, but 94 rooms were plundered and their contents ruined, and many archives and works of art were destroyed or missing. During the fire, books and papers were thrown out of the windows and the crowd below tossed them into the flames.

For many Bulgarian citizens who observed the event on television, this was a climatic act in the attempt to overthrow Bulgarian communism. Whether they supported it or not, they saw it as a turning point in the overall process of political change. Moved by the news reports, many citizens of the capital joined the crowds, either with the intention of taking part in the mass euphoria, or in the hope of calming things down and preventing further destruction. People perceived the fire as an emblematic

event, similar in meaning to a 'people's revolution', or at least a mass event where the crowd could demonstrate its power and assert the right to have its voice heard. However, the enthusiasm which accompanied the storming of what for decades had been the bastion of communist rule already began to fade in the days that followed, when it gradually became clear that the fire had been started from inside the building (most probably by communist activists) and was in fact a cynical attempt to destroy important papers from the party archive while making it look as if it was the protesters outside who were to blame. In subsequent investigations it transpired that the police and fire brigade had acted in a largely uncoordinated manner, as if they had been deliberately prevented from working together. There had been no serious attempt to prevent protesters from entering the building or to put out the flames, and no effort had been made to rescue documents from the burning offices. As if on cue, the democratic opposition was accused of having instigated the fire and the 'City of Truth' (the protest camp in the centre of the capital, established in opposition to the continued presence of communist symbols) was destroyed.

Immediately after the fire, the General Prosecution Office of the Republic launched an official investigation, which concluded that the violence was carried out 'simultaneously and without organisation by fired-up extremists'. Thirty-eight people were charged with criminal acts, most of them caught in the building or in the square during the night of 26–7 August. In none of these cases was there sufficient evidence (or indeed any evidence) that the accused had been involved in starting the fire or in helping it to spread. With no reasonable justification, the inquest also concluded that responsibility for the fire rested with members of the 'Civil Disobedience' movement. Meanwhile, little or no heed was taken of counter-evidence that the fire had actually been prepared and initiated from inside. The lack of sufficient proof for any of the two main versions led the City Court to drop all legal proceedings in 1994 and to send the case back to the City Prosecution Office for additional investigation. In August 1996 the investigation was closed down completely on the grounds that prosecutions were no longer possible given the passage of time. The mystery surrounding the events of 26–7 August 1990 remains to this day, with questions still unanswered as to what actually disappeared in the fire and who might have been interested in ensuring its destruction. As no clear information has ever been made available on the exact content of the archives that were present in the building, speculation has centred on files concerning the party's secret collaboration with state security, official documents about the regime's financial policies, and materials concerning major state trials against the regime's opponents or against falsely accused 'traitors' like Kostov. None of these suspicions have been confirmed, and as in previous events which were supposed to mark a turning point in relation

to political change, the population was left with a sense of confusion over what had actually happened.

The debate over who started the fire – protesters from outside, or communist cadres from inside – turned into the core of subsequent interpretations of the event: as an act of vandalism aimed at undermining the Bulgarian state and threatening civic peace, or as a well-prepared and treacherous attempt to destroy precious documentation and at the same time blacken the name of the opposition movement, less than a month after the election of the leader of the democratic opposition, Zhelev, as president. These two irreconcilable positions were reflected in numerous testimonies and publications that appeared in the following years. A radical stance against the opposition group was taken in a book by the then vice-president and former long-serving deputy minister of defence in the communist era, General Atanas Semerdjiev. In it, he claims that during the night of 26–7 August the state was on the verge of civil war because of a sinister plan by the opposition to seize power by anti-constitutional and anti-parliamentary means. Semerdjiev accuses the members of the movement *Grazhdansko nepodchinenie* (Civil Disobedience) of having planned the assault in advance with the intention of provoking violence and bloodshed and then putting all the blame on the communists.¹² The book abounds with expressive metaphors about the ‘innate hatred’, ‘rage’, ‘devil spirits’, and ‘terror’ in ‘the night that made the country shiver in panic’.¹³ A different approach was applied in the film *Priklyucheno po davnost* (*Closed by Prescription*, 2009), directed by Malina Petrova, in which the events are reconstructed on the basis of interviews with individual members of the opposition accused of various criminal offences, and with those officials who had a close-up view of the unfolding drama. According to Petrova, the fire followed a carefully prepared scenario drawn up by the former BCP with the participation of representatives of the security services, who would soon be richly rewarded for the successful organisation of this act. Such an argument not only supported the theory of a plot from within, with parallels to what would soon become the typical *modus operandi* of the Bulgarian mafia. It also underlined the view that in the Bulgaria of the 1990s, even acts that at first appeared to be spontaneous expressions of a ‘revolutionary’ spirit might later be reinterpreted as having been stage-managed or manipulated by forces from within whose ultimate intention was to prevent change and retain the trappings of communist rule.

Although the spontaneity and chaos that characterised the fire in the Party House continued to appear in many other protest movements and demonstrations in the years that followed, the belief in the possibility of a ‘frank’ and ‘fair’ hearing for the political claims of the people had largely vanished. Already in 1992 there was hardly a trace left of the euphoria

of 1989. While the democratic ideas of the early 1990s instilled hope for a better future and a political reorientation away from the depraved practices of the past, such idealism gradually gave way to pragmatism. The constant fluctuations in the political sphere and the endless formation and dissolution of coalitions not only failed to bring success in developing a wide anti-communist front, but also resulted in an increasing withdrawal of the public from political action. While the personal conflicts and rivalry between the leaders of the democratic opposition resulted in a gradual indifference to the 'blue idea', the BSP managed to strengthen its appeal to voters and regain a level of public support and confidence that few people would have expected back in the first 'revolutionary' years after 1989. In a situation of deepening economic crisis, social insecurity and disillusionment with the results of political and market reforms, the feelings of regret and nostalgia for 'what was before' seemed a logical psychological response. In some instances this even went as far as questioning the need for a break with communist rule at all.

Having started with enthusiasm about the opportunity for a new political beginning in Bulgaria, the 1990s turned out to be a decade of failed promises, sharply falling living standards and sudden swings of the pendulum between right and left. The rapid embracing of the market by political leaders, new and old, the self-enrichment of the new economic elites, and the increasing criminalisation of the state destroyed much of the previous idealism about the value of public protests. The latter continued to take place (mostly before and after elections), helping to sustain the earlier tensions between 'blue' and 'red' supporters. After several changes of government in the early 1990s, the victory of the BSP in the December 1994 parliamentary elections allowed it to form a government by itself in January 1995. However, following a disastrous financial policy that led to unprecedented crisis and hyperinflation, the prime minister, Zhan Videnov, announced his resignation at the end of 1996. The turn of the year was marked by some of the largest public protests ever seen in major Bulgarian towns, designed to prevent the socialists from forming a new government. Although this was not, in my view, a fresh 'revolutionary attempt' to overthrow communism, the demonstrations largely followed the format of protest gatherings in the early 1990s, and their escalation in the assault on the Bulgarian Parliament in January 1997 had parallels with the attack on the Party House in August 1990. There were also crucial differences, however, both in terms of the overall spontaneity of the 1996–97 protests, and the absence of provocation from inside the building. Although this time the protesters had their demands satisfied, in that the BSP was not able to form the next government and was instead forced into opposition, they left a deep memory in Bulgarian society, as Elena Simeonova argues in her chapter. However, far from being received positively, for many

Bulgarians, the events of 1996–97 symbolised yet another failure in the political realm and left behind a feeling of disorientation, made even worse by a further decline in living standards.

The destruction of the mausoleum, 1999

The last example in the 1990s of a pressing public demand that failed to result in a symbolic act of overturning the communist regime is the well-known case of Georgi Dimitrov's mausoleum in Sofia. This building was among the grandest symbols of the communist era and thus entered into the spotlight of public attention after the end of communist rule.¹⁴ In 1990, the monument was denounced as a 'temple of the devil' that had to be confronted through political protests and religious rituals. Night-time candle-lit processions were organised in March 1990, Orthodox sanctifications of the square in front of the mausoleum were carried out, and protest meetings were held. On 18 July 1990, 41 years after being placed on public display, the embalmed corpse of Dimitrov was removed from the mausoleum and cremated. However, the debates about the fate of the building continued. Due mainly to the influence of the BSP in parliament, all attempts at destruction were prevented, thus turning the building into the ultimate marker of the impossibility of carrying out symbolic transformations. The constant deferral of a decision on this matter and the ongoing uncertainty this created also supported the idea of the 'un-happened' revolution, an idea which the UDF government decided to end once and for all by destroying the building in 1999. Demolition work began almost immediately, before the public could have any time to react. Indeed most of the debate on these actions took place during a brief pause before the final stage began. Explosives were laid on 22 August 1999, but the first three attempts to blow up the tomb succeeded only in tilting it. Four days later a new and more powerful explosion destroyed the roof and the walls. The four explosions were followed by a gradual dismantling of the building by machines which continued for about ten days. This long drawn out process was interpreted by the public and the media as an act of 'opposition' by the tomb itself and as a refusal of the former regime to clear the symbolic space it had previously occupied.

Taking place almost ten years after the fall of communism as a state ideology in Bulgaria, the removal of the mausoleum was already too little too late. It came after years of public debates and demands for the building's destruction, but the final decision was neither a result nor a response to these debates. The implementation of this act came as a surprise to many people, including even the most vehement opponents of the mausoleum's preservation, who seemed long ago to have given up the hope that their demands for its removal would ever be fulfilled. The

irony, however, was that, as with Zhivkov's removal in 1989, the decision was taken 'from above' and 'behind the scenes', leaving the public with hardly any opportunity to object or take part. As before, people only learned about it from watching television, reading newspapers, or at best, observing the event at a distance. Thus, although purporting to mark a crowning achievement in the dismantling of communism in Bulgaria, the destruction of the Dimitrov mausoleum paradoxically sustained the notion of an unfinished project in relation to the political transformation of the country. As a measure that had been successfully resisted by governments for many years in spite of the popular mood, the removal of the mausoleum failed to meet public expectations for a final reckoning with the communist past. Instead, it came across largely as a postponed effect of a 'symbolic revolution' that seemed to have already occurred many years before.

Conclusion

The notion of a 'revolution that hardly happened' has had a major impact on interpretations of the year 1989 in Bulgaria and this can still be felt today in spite of the passage of time. Whereas the 'thirst for change' did not find satisfaction in the 1990s due to systematic delays in legislation, punctuated by sudden reversals and decisions at certain 'crisis' moments, the 'hunger for truth' was frustrated by missing evidence, decisions made behind closed doors, destruction of documents and evasion of responsibility. In the first decade after communism, there were many events contributing to the political transformation of Bulgaria, but none of them stands out as a defining 'revolutionary' act, not even the dropping of article 1 of the constitution, the first democratic elections, or the protest meetings and the students' strikes of the early 1990s. Elements in a long and somewhat protracted process, these developments could not dispel the prevailing impression that little had changed and that a proper confrontation with the past was still being avoided.

Although the dismantling of the one party state, the removal of the communist party's leading role in state and society, and the return of constitutionally guaranteed judicial norms and human rights were important steps in breaking with the communist past, the circumstances of their occurrence made it problematic to associate them with what was expected to happen in a 'revolution'. Not only did this arise largely after the party's decision for Zhivkov's removal (unlike Hungary and Poland, for example, where public protests against the regimes marked most of 1980s), but it frequently took place in a way that avoided the involvement of the people and, rather, took the general public by surprise. This conditioned both the perception of events as being staged by an invisible nexus of power, and the overall post-communist transition as a play that could be observed

on the television screen without participation actually taking place. With this in mind, it is hardly surprising that in 2009 the twentieth anniversary of the changes in Bulgaria were marked by a great deal of confusion over what exactly to celebrate and what to mark as bringing a 'new beginning'. The only solution, and one that was hardly satisfactory, was to copy similar initiatives in other Eastern European states, for instance the destruction of an artificial 'Berlin Wall' in the centre of Sofia. From the perspective of the passage of time, this may be a truly discouraging observation. However, beyond the disappointments of the transition period and the divergent interpretations of the first post-communist decade, there remained the memory of enthusiastic gatherings and popular protests. Although not amounting to a 'revolution', and failing even to court that label, they revealed a level of idealism and public engagement that had an even greater value than a 'realised' revolutionary act.

Notes

- 1 A well-known joke in the late 1980s had Zhivkov's commenting on *perestroika* as follows: 'Let's lie low for a while, until the dangerous winds calm down'.
- 2 See in this respect R. J. Crampton's observation that 'In 1989 Bulgaria experienced a palace coup rather than a popular revolution and "people power" was more a consequence than the cause of the change of leadership' – Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century and After*, 2nd edn (London and New York, 1997), p. 395.
- 3 On these terminological shifts, see N. Vukov, 'Remembrance of Communism on the Former Day of Socialist Victory: 9th of September in Ritual Ceremonies of Post-1989 Bulgaria', in M. Todorova and St. Troebst (eds), *Remembering Communism: New Approaches to the Memory and History of Communism* (Münster, forthcoming).
- 4 See e. g. P. Stoyanova and E. Iliev, *Politicheski opasni litsa – vǎdvoryavania, trudova mobilizatsiya, izselvania sled 1944 g.* (Sofia, 1991); H. Brăzhitsov, *3000 noshti v zatvora* (Sofia, 1991); and K. Kostov, *Zatvornik K-89* (Sofia, 1992). Also the works of the famous dissident writer and journalist Georgi Markov which were published in Bulgaria after the changes – *Zadochni reportazhi za Bulgaria* (Sofia, 1990); and *Kogato chasovnitsite sa spreli: Novi zadochni reportazhi za Bulgaira* (Sofia, 1991).
- 5 See *Sbornik dokumenti 'Narodna demokratsia ili diktatura: Hristomatiya po istoriya na Bulgaria, 1944–1948'* (Sofia, 1992); Zh. Zhivkov, *Krǎglata masa na Politburo; 16-ta republika; Sluchayat Kremikovtsi; Razgromǎt na Teksim; Chehoslovashkite sǎbitiya; Krah na ednolichnata vlast* (Sofia, 1991); A. Musakov, *Shesto* (Sofia, 1991).

- 6 See K. Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Post-Socialist Change* (New York, 1999).
- 7 See Zh. Cvetkov, *Šadāt nad opozitsionnite lideri* (Sofia, 1991); G. M. Dimitrov, *Prisāda sreshtu komunizma 1949–1972: Statii, rechi i izkazvaniya* (Sofia, 1991); G. M. Dimitrov, *Spomeni* (Sofia, 1993); N. D. Petkov, *Predsmyrtnite pisma na Nikola D. Petkov do Georgi Dimitrov i Vasil Kolarov, 19 avgust–22 septemvri 1947* (Sofia, 1992).
- 8 See E. Boncheva (ed.), *Bālgarskiyat Gulag: svideteli. Sbornik dokumentalni razkazi za kontslagerite v Bālgaria* (Sofia, 1991); Tz. Todorov (ed.), *Voices from the Gulag: Life and Death in Communist Bulgaria* (University Park, 1999).
- 9 On the Kostov trial, see B. Hristov, *Izpitaniето: Spomeni za protsesa i sādбата na Traicho Kostov i negovata grupa* (Sofia, 1995); P. Yapov, *Traicho Kostov i Nikola Geshev: Sādebnite procesi prez 1942 i 1949 g.* (Sofia, 2003); and G. H. Hodos, *Show Trials: Stalinist Purges in Eastern Europe, 1948–1954* (New York, 1987), pp. 15–23.
- 10 The People’s Court (*Naroden sād*) functioned between December 1944 and April 1945, and put on trial individuals who held key positions in the government and state institutions during the Second World War. Those indicted included former ministers, regents and royal advisers, parliamentary representatives, ‘war criminals’ and so on. In fact, the purpose was to purge the political and intellectual elite and to destroy any possible opposition to communists in the country. Sentences were passed in 9,550 cases, including 2,680 where the death penalty was applied. See N. Poppetrov, P. Meshkova and D. Sharlanov, *Bālgarskata gilotina: Taynite mehanizmi na Narodnia sād* (Sofia, 1994); P. Semerdjiev, *Narodniat sād v Bulgaria, 1944–1945* (Blagoevgrad, 1998).
- 11 On the Stalinist purges more generally, see K. McDermott and M. Stibbe (eds), *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Terror and Mass Purges* (Manchester, 2010).
- 12 For instance, an excerpt from the book, appearing also on the book cover, read: ‘In the night of 26–27 August 1990, flames blew out above the Party House in Sofia, lighting the darkest political passions ... As it was obvious, things had to pass through bloody disturbances, in order to “settle accounts – once and for all – with the damned communists”. *In short, what was needed was an “authentic”, not a “tender”, revolution*’ (emphasis mine). See A. Semerdjiev, *Pozharāt’90: Nenakazanoto prestāplenie* (Sofia, 2008).
- 13 Apart from his political convictions, Semerdjiev had other reasons to support this version. In 1992 he was tried and sentenced, together with another general, for the destruction of almost 150,000 secret files during a ‘restructuring of archives’ at the ministry of the interior. Later, their sentences were overturned, but suspicions concerning the systematic destruction of files and archival materials (some of which was initiated

during the assault on the Party House) continue to haunt Bulgarian society to the present day.

- 14 On the debate over and the final destruction of Dimitrov's mausoleum, see L. Deyanova, 'The Battles for the Mausoleum: Traumatic Places of Collective Memory', in J. Coenen-Huther (ed.), *Bulgaria at the Crossroads* (New York, 1997); N. Vukov, 'The Destruction of Dimitrov's Mausoleum in Sofia: The "Incoincidence" between Memory and Its Referents', *OCTOGON – Arhitectura & Design*, Bucharest, vol. 11 (2001), pp. 119–25; and M. Todorova, 'The Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov as *lieu de mémoire*', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 78, no. 2 (2006), pp. 377–411.

Afterword: the discursive constitution of revolution and revolution envy

James Krapfl

If there is one thing the chapters in this collection make clear, it is that there are insights to be gained from seeing the revolutions of 1989 not just as a moment, but as a process. As Mary Buckley and Michal Pullmann show, the rearticulations of power relations that Mikhail Gorbachev introduced destabilised East European regimes in ways that made the dramatic events of 1989 possible. And as Artur Lipiński demonstrates, attempts to fix the meaning of these events continue to structure politics in the region. From the earliest developments in this sequence to the most recent, there is a causal and thematic interconnection that points to a single process.

While this *longue durée* interconnectedness can be profitably examined from multiple angles – economic structures, class relations and political cleavages among them – it is the interconnectedness of cognitive structures that the chapters in this volume most originally elucidate. Several contributors stress ways in which discourse has been a crucial instrument in the hands of Central and East European politicians since the late 1980s. I would like to complement and synthesise their efforts by examining discourse as a medium through which events have stimulated structural change and vice versa. In particular, I will focus on the trope of revolution itself, considering what Gorbachev meant when he declared that *perestroika* was a revolution, and examining how discourses of revolution changed in 1989 and have been evolving since. I would like to suggest that from the beginning of this process the trope of revolution has served a legitimising function which explains its continuing importance in regional politics – recently and dramatically in Viktor Orbán’s proclamation of an ‘electoral revolution’ in Hungary in 2010. Independently of the question of whether there ‘really’ was a revolution in any of the Soviet bloc countries in the years following Gorbachev’s rise to power, the ways he and many others have used the term have had significant impact on real political struggles.

I will structure this piece chronologically, beginning with the ‘*perestroika* revolution’ and examining how the concept of revolution was reconfigured in 1989, then proceeding to how it has been an instrument of political struggle since 1989 – even in countries that arguably did not experience revolution in 1989. I will conclude with some historical comparisons in order to contextualise this most recent of the revolutionary processes that have characterised European history in modern times.

‘*Perestroika* is a revolution’

Why did Gorbachev declare in 1986 that *perestroika* was a revolution?¹ ‘Perestroika is a word with many meanings’, he explained.

But if we are to choose from its many possible synonyms the key one which expresses its essence most accurately, then we can say thus: *perestroika* is a revolution. A decisive acceleration of the socioeconomic and cultural development of Soviet society which involves radical changes on the way to a qualitatively new state is undoubtedly a revolutionary task.²

Obviously, Gorbachev was trying to legitimise his controversial proposals to restructure Soviet economic, political and social frameworks by situating them within an ideological discourse that was already considered legitimate. Soviet communism, of course, insisted that it was revolutionary, a continuation of the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917. Gorbachev argued that by means of *perestroika*, Soviet communism was going back to Lenin.

[I]n its essence, in its Bolshevik daring and in its humane social thrust the present course is a direct sequel to the great accomplishments started by the Leninist Party in the October days of 1917. And not merely a sequel, but an extension and a development of the main ideas of the Revolution.³

Between 1986 and his fall from power in 1991, Gorbachev repeatedly emphasised that Lenin had been a creative revolutionary; instead of allowing Marxist dogma to constrain his actions, Lenin had responded to changing situations flexibly. According to Gorbachev, *perestroika* was a Leninist response to the economic difficulties of the 1980s comparable to Lenin’s New Economic Policy of the 1920s. Basically, Gorbachev argued that *perestroika* was a continuation of the world socialist revolution that Lenin had begun, simply bringing it to a new phase.

Perestroika, of course, disrupted existing structures in the Soviet bloc in ways that Gorbachev did not anticipate. As Buckley points out, *perestroika* led to a volatilisation of politics in the USSR, ultimately enabling restive nationalities to demand sovereignty for their titular republics and leading, after the multi-candidate elections of March and April 1989, to high-level

calls for an end to the Communist Party's leading role. Moscow was also deeply articulated into the structures of political, economic and social life in the satellite states, such that the '*perestroika* revolution' produced astonishing results there as well. In Hungary and Poland, it was officially welcomed. Gorbachev even saw independently liberalising Hungary as a model for Soviet *perestroika*, sending advisers to Budapest to learn from the economic and political reforms that János Kádár's regime had begun to implement in 1984.⁴ Polish communists also welcomed *perestroika* as an opportunity to respond more flexibly to their economic crisis. In Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, the response was mixed. Elena Simeonova explains how Todor Zhivkov reversed his initial opposition to *perestroika* to propose a restructuring so radical that Gorbachev personally intervened to temper it. In Czechoslovakia, Pullmann writes, communist rulers 'prevaricated' before 1987, but once it became clear that *perestroika* was really going forward in the Soviet Union, they reluctantly announced a Czechoslovak version restricted to the economic sphere. In East Germany and Romania, the official response to *perestroika* was rejection.

Even if the regimes dismissed *perestroika* or carefully limited the forms it might take in their countries, the 'revolution' underway in the USSR gave new ammunition to critical members of society, particularly those who had hitherto abstained from dissident activity, including members of the ruling elite. Peter Grieder and Matthew Stibbe discuss how *perestroika* became a standard around which reform-minded members of the SED could rally, with Erich Honecker's 1988 ban on *Sputnik* and censorship of Soviet news only intensifying opposition to his policies within the party. In Czechoslovakia, as Pullmann emphasises, *perestroika* provided an opportunity for proponents of a purer socialism as well as advocates of liberated markets to stake their claims with increasing confidence – a development that was probably typical throughout most of the bloc.

The results of *perestroika* in Poland and Hungary were the Round Table talks, which took place with Gorbachev's explicit approval. All of the remarkable events of the summer of 1989 – from the opening of the Austro-Hungarian border to the installation of a Solidarity-led government in Poland – could be, and indeed still were, interpreted within the framework of *perestroika*. It was not yet imagined that these developments would lead to a dramatic reconfiguration of the European continent and the complete demise of Soviet-style socialism. As Pullmann demonstrates for Czechoslovakia, however, Gorbachev's revolution undermined the consensus upon which socialism was based by forcing discussion of the hitherto taboo question of what exactly socialism was. This discussion revealed the emptiness of the master signifier upon which social consensus in the country depended, just as the Soviet quest for the 'real' Lenin that Gorbachev inaugurated led to the realisation that the 'real' Lenin was

unknown.⁵ Research along these lines in other bloc countries would probably reveal similar processes. It was a discursive development that would result in a far greater 'restructuring' than Gorbachev imagined.

Popular revolution

A new conceptualisation of revolution emerged in popular discourse in East Germany immediately following the successful march of the 70,000 in Leipzig on 9 October, and in Czechoslovakia directly following the brutally suppressed student-led march in Prague on 17 November.⁶ Previously, frustrated citizens had complained that their countries were missing out on the liberalisation taking place in the Soviet Union, Poland and Hungary, expressing a desire for a robust domestic *perestroika*.⁷ Now, they and ever more of their fellow citizens began investing the word *revolution* with new meaning. Robert Darnton suggests that East Germans adopted the term as a result of their Marxist education and there is evidence that this was the case in Czechoslovakia as well.⁸ As one of the Czech student organisers later recalled: 'In this technology the communists themselves paradoxically taught us. Even if one didn't want to, one read about strikes, about revolution, about partisans and the anti-fascist movement, about how struggles were organised. From this it followed that we knew what and how.'⁹ What made the word compelling, though, and what filled it with new meaning was the experience of collective action and the realisation thereby of dramatic structural changes that had been scarcely imaginable only a short while before. The intensity of collective emotion in the autumn of 1989, which has been described in countless German, Czech and Slovak memoirs and is quite palpable in film footage, gave many participants a sense of ontological transformation that they often describe as 'rebirth', or an absolute break in time.¹⁰ In the vocabulary available to most citizens at the time, *revolution* was the only word that seemed appropriate to describe this powerful experience – and to distinguish *this* revolution from those in the history books they added adjectives reflecting their experience: peaceful, merry, beautiful, gentle, cleansing, democratic, popular or velvet.¹¹ The term became a new transcendent signifier representing collective ideals and the new sense of community (or, as Robin Okey puts it, fraternity) that had come into being.

Just as references to Lenin, socialism or *perestroika* had previously been used to legitimise proposed actions, so now East German and Czechoslovak citizens could justify their claims in the name of the popular revolution. Civic Forum in the Bohemian town of Cheb declared that if the district's deputy to the Czech National Council had not realised 'after four weeks of revolution' that he should resign, it was time for citizens to take the necessary steps to recall him.¹² In the southern Slovak town

of Komárno, the editors of a new independent newspaper challenged functionaries who questioned the authority of Public against Violence and the Independent Hungarian Initiative to press for the enforcement of workers' votes of no confidence in their directors (meaning by existing law that they were dismissed):

Gentlemen, or rather comrades, let us not forget that there is a REVOLUTION going on here. It may be the most gentle of all in the world, but still. Revolution, as even Marxists know, is a rapid qualitative change in the development of society. A change that must remove without trace the old social order – in our case the dictatorial system of government by one party, outdated laws and regulations – in other words, everything that stands in the revolution's way!¹³

Eventually even communists in East Germany and Czechoslovakia began speaking of revolution to legitimise the steps that they were taking. As the SED Central Committee acknowledged on 10 November, 'a revolutionary movement has set in motion a process of serious upheaval'.¹⁴ It is important to note that even as *revolution* was developing a new meaning in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, older senses continued alongside the new one. After the October and November breakthroughs in the two countries, many citizens rejoiced that now they at last had the opportunity to implement *perestroika*. The GDR historian Jürgen Kuczynski, whom Stibbe discusses in his chapter, was a prime example. Even if such individuals continued to desire *perestroika* or a reformed socialism, however, they now justified their claims with reference to the new master signifier: revolution. As soldiers of the Czechoslovak People's Army explained to striking students in Košice: 'We agree with your revolutionary stand in support of our leaders' efforts to achieve socialism without errors.'¹⁵

Opposition to the term *revolution* emerged shortly after its application to unfolding history became widespread in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. Initially, of course, came old guard insistence that what was transpiring was a 'counter-revolution'.¹⁶ Later, when Egon Krenz replaced Honecker as SED chief on 18 October, he chose to label the events a *Wende* – a mere 'turn' – which was a rhetorical strategy for legitimising a new party programme and simultaneously drawing attention away from *revolution's* radical implications. Helmut Kohl and the West German press would ultimately adopt Krenz's moniker for similar reasons. In Czechoslovakia, after the Government of National Understanding had come into being and Gustáv Husák had resigned as president – and after Václav Havel had publicly declared his candidacy for the office – Havel and other Civic Forum elites likewise began distancing themselves from the term *revolution*. On 10 December, he publicly questioned whether the

‘excited and dramatic period’ through which he and his fellow citizens were living could really be called a revolution, stating that only historians, someday, would be able to decide.¹⁷ In mid-January 1990, Petr Pithart, who became Civic Forum’s chief spokesman after Havel’s assumption of the presidential office, went on federal television to say that he was ‘afraid’ of the word *revolution* and, in the context of mounting unrest at local levels, to ‘urgently appeal to Civic Fora in workplaces and localities to eschew all pseudo-revolutionary methods’.¹⁸

Neither Krenz nor the Civic Forum spokesmen succeeded in expunging the word *revolution* from popular vocabularies, and citizens would continue to invoke the idea of revolution to justify demands or actions into the 1990s. Czech communists complained in May 1990 that the revolution was not being gentle enough.¹⁹ Local branches of Civic Forum urged citizens to vote in the November 1990 communal elections in order to ‘complete’ the revolution.²⁰ In March 1991, Vladimír Mečiar justified the foundation of the ‘For a Democratic Slovakia’ faction within Public against Violence by arguing that the movement’s leaders had ‘betrayed part of the sense of the revolution’.²¹

In Romania we see an interesting variation. Whereas Krenz, Havel and Pithart had tried to displace *revolution* from public discourse as a means of trying to end the revolution, Ion Iliescu and his allies in the National Salvation Front (FSN) tried to end the revolution by co-opting the word and insisting that they represented the revolution. Kevin Adamson and Sergiu Florean brilliantly document this successful strategy in their contribution to this volume. The only potential alternative to the FSN (established in Bucharest on 22 December) was the Romanian Democratic Front that had emerged in Timișoara two days previously; it, however, could not compete with the FSN’s rhetoric because the FSN controlled the state-run mass media. Later, of course, Timișoara would become central in the narratives of opponents to the National Salvation Front – narratives which posited that the real revolution had begun in Timișoara, and what happened in Bucharest was the theft of this revolution.²² In contrast, Iliescu would continue to maintain that the real revolution had occurred in Bucharest, with events in Timișoara at most a prelude. Incidentally, this Romanian cleavage parallels the dispute in Germany between a Leipzig-based narrative of a Peaceful Revolution and a Berlin-based narrative of a *Wende*.

Revolution envy

In Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria a phenomenon occurred that we might (with apologies to Freud) call ‘revolution envy’. In East Germany and Czechoslovakia there were clearly moments when citizens themselves,

assembling in public space, determined the course of events, and we can point to examples of elites in *Neues Forum* or Civic Forum – not to mention the ruling regimes – reversing decisions in response to developments on the street.²³ Even in Romania it was popular, rather than elite, action that achieved the initial breakthrough. In Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria, however, structural change was not a direct consequence of popular involvement. Citizens in Poland and Hungary may have applauded now and then – and were definitely a force that the Solidarity leadership and the Opposition Round Table knew they could mobilise if need be – but it was the opposition and party elites who called the shots.²⁴ In Bulgaria, as Simeonova and Nikolai Vukov emphasise, there was little more than a palace coup in 1989, and popular participation counted for even less than in Poland and Hungary. As a result of these power dynamics, citizens of Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria have generally been vociferous in their insistence that no revolution occurred in their countries in 1989. Those who, early on, dared to apply the term to domestic conditions did so only after the dramatic events of October and November in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, and they made their arguments by situating domestic events within a broader regional context.²⁵ Desire to mimic achievements in East Germany and Czechoslovakia later influenced political developments in the ‘non-revolutionary’ states, from Lech Wałęsa’s appeal for an ‘acceleration’ of the transformative process to the election of Árpád Göncz as Hungary’s president as a conscious response to Czechoslovakia’s election of Václav Havel.²⁶ A further sign of envy – from a psychoanalytic viewpoint – can be seen in the frequent insistence of Poles, Hungarians and Bulgarians that not just their countries, but *no* country experienced a revolution in 1989. This rhetorical denial of ‘revolution’ to other countries can be seen as the jealous expression of an unsatisfied desire for the potency that ‘revolution’ symbolises.

As Vukov and Lipiński demonstrate, the sense that a revolution *should* have happened in 1989 has structured political discourse in Bulgaria and Poland ever since. In the former, Vukov argues that the party’s decision to depose Zhivkov was a successful ploy to intercept revolutionary mobilisation before it could mature. ‘Revolution’ nonetheless remained ‘the envisioned means of overturning communist rule’, prompting a series of popular and elite attempts in the 1990s to compensate for its absence – from protests, marches and strikes in 1990 to the demolition of the Dimitrov mausoleum in 1999. To the extent that Bulgarians, like Simeonova, regard the protests of 1996–97 as ‘the real revolution’, these protests can likewise be seen as an attempt to make up for the absence in 1989 of a major event that could symbolise a radical break with the past and give Bulgarian citizens the sense that they were ‘authors of their own history’.

In Poland, Lipiński notes, complaints about the lack of a revolution were voiced as early as 1990. While in Bulgaria there was a cleavage between the ‘reds’ (the Socialists), who claimed that the party’s dismissal of Zhivkov had been revolutionary, and the ‘blues’ (the Union of Democratic Forces), who insisted that there had been no revolution, in Poland there was a general consensus that no revolution had occurred. The cleavage has been between those who argue that this was a good thing (the ‘reds’ and the ‘pinks’) and those who regard it as a mistake or betrayal (the ‘blues’). As in Bulgaria, so in Poland the problem of what Vukov calls an ‘un-happened’ revolution has been one of the most divisive issues in post-communist politics, with right-wing politicians endeavouring to delegitimise their erstwhile partners in Solidarity by identifying them as traitors who prevented Poles from realising their revolutionary potential. In 1997, right-wing parties campaigned successfully on the promise to ‘complete’ the revolution of 1989, and as Lipiński makes clear, debates about the meaning of 1989 continue to structure Polish political discourse.

Hungary closely resembles Poland in this regard. Again, there is a general consensus that no revolution occurred in 1989, and a cleavage between those (like the liberal János Kis) who regard this as a good thing and right-wing politicians (like Viktor Orbán) who argue that there *should* have been a revolution.²⁷ Orbán has, of course, gone farther than his Polish colleagues in his promise to give Hungary the revolution it deserves, beginning with the ‘electoral revolution’ of 2010 that resulted in what Orbán has described as a ‘revolutionary parliament’ and culminating in 2012 in a ‘constitutional revolution’ that has isolated Hungary within the European Union.

Sharp debate over the meaning of 1989 has, of course, not been limited to Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria. Participants in the December events in Timișoara began arguing in early 1990 that their revolution had been ‘stolen’; in November 1990, Czech students who had been at the forefront of the previous year’s events made a similar claim. In East Germany in late January 1990 left-leaning members of *Neues Forum* began criticising their colleague Joachim Gauck (now federal president) for jumping too soon onto the reunification bandwagon, thereby undermining the more radical social and civic aspects of the revolution.²⁸ Ever since 1990, sizeable numbers of citizens in Germany, Romania and the Czech and Slovak Republics have articulated the need somehow to ‘complete’ the revolution begun in 1989, or have pointed out ways in which reality has not lived up to their expectations in that year. The difference between these countries and those with a tradition of ‘revolution envy’ is that the former have a referent that practically all sides in political debates (with the exception of Czech communists) can invoke to legitimise their programmes. Whether or not everyone agrees to identify what happened as a revolution – or whether it

should be symbolised by Leipzig or Berlin, Timișoara or Bucharest – there is a functional consensus that something happened in 1989 of which citizens can be proud, and which provides a generally accepted foundation myth, or source of legitimacy, for the present political order. In Central Europe, this contrast was starkly manifest in the twentieth-anniversary commemorations of the events of 1989. In Leipzig and Prague, crowds on a scale comparable to those of 1989 retraced the processional routes of 9 October and 17 November, uniting East and West Germans, Czechs and Slovaks, and citizens of opposing political persuasions. Citizens were once again on centre stage. In Poland and Hungary, by contrast, commemorations were by and large the affairs of elites and counter-elites, with barricades and the heavy presence of riot police to ensure that citizens did not get too close.²⁹

Discourses of revolution in historical perspective

This afterword has emphasised the interplay of discourse and structure in a sequence of inter-connected events that have been called revolutionary. Within this discursive field, the trope of revolution has served to legitimise actions, both proposed and undertaken. As we saw in the case of *perestroika*, the ‘revolution’ unintentionally destabilised the master signifiers – Lenin in the case of the Soviet Union, ‘socialism’ in Czechoslovakia and probably other satellite states – that underpinned authoritative discourses governing social, political and economic structures. This destabilisation made the dramatic events of 1989 possible, and in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Romania these events gave rise to a new master signifier: revolution re-imagined, representing collective ideals and a vivid sense of a united authoritative citizenry. Even in Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria, the emptying of the signifiers upon which real-socialist consensus had been based stimulated desire for an act that would symbolise the people as authors of their own destiny, such that ‘1989’ still came to structure post-communist discourse, but in these cases as a symbol of betrayal, exclusion and emasculation that has informed a discourse of desire for the ‘un-happened’ revolution.

Numerous factors have complicated this basic picture. In Hungary and Poland, the events of 1989 were shaped by popular desire for recognition of previous moments of collective effervescence when citizens, for a time, had successfully seized authority to chart their own futures. Demands for the re-legalisation of Solidarity and official recognition of the Hungarian events of 1956 as a revolution, rather than a counter-revolution, were central. However, the fact that citizens were invited to participate in these rehabilitations more or less as onlookers, rather than re-enacting the seizure of authorship, meant that these rehabilitations failed to satisfy. In all countries, moreover, the ‘nation’ emerged as a master signifier in some

cases harmonious with ‘revolution’, but in other cases substituting for its perceived absence, theft or interruption.

Several contributors to this volume raise the question of whether, after all, the events of 1989 can ‘really’ be identified as revolutions. I have bypassed this question of ‘objective’ definitions to focus on how participants in the events have themselves made sense of them, arguing that while a chain of events is unfolding, the ways in which participants try to fix its meaning can be significant in determining its outcome. Historical occurrences are not inherently meaningful: human beings must create this meaning through acts of signification, such that discourse and events are mutually constitutive. It is an act of signification that transforms a set of occurrences into a historical event – a signifier that can be invoked for legitimacy and thus serve as the building block or motive for establishing or altering socio-political structures.

Since the word *revolution* first entered political discourse in the seventeenth century, it has always been a rhetorical instrument for claiming legitimacy. In England in the 1640s and 1650s, for example, supporters of the Parliamentary cause invoked the term *revolution* because at the time it suggested that Providence, rather than any mortal power, was responsible for the dramatic disruption that the English people had witnessed in their government – that God had brought the Puritans to power, just as he ordained the revolutions of the heavens. With this divine sanction, the constitutional changes that followed royalist defeat could be regarded as legitimate. The Cavaliers, for their part, rejected the word *revolution* precisely for these connotations, arguing instead that what had happened was an illegitimate rebellion in which God had played no part.³⁰

In France the word *revolution* was widely used in the years before 1789 in a manner strikingly reminiscent of how Gorbachev employed it before 1989. When Louis XVI authorised the creation of regional assemblies in 1787, the event was hailed as the ‘most complete and happiest of revolutions’, and the reorganisation of the justice system in 1788 was described in comparable fashion.³¹ Even the calling of the Estates-General was interpreted as a revolution within the framework of a reforming monarchy.³² The appropriation of the term to signify an act of popular sovereignty did not occur until 20 July 1789, when the National Assembly reversed its initial condemnation of the Parisian attack on the Bastille in recognition of the victory this event had given the Assembly over a recalcitrant monarch. Identifying as a revolution what it had originally regarded as a riot was a means for the Assembly to legitimise the foundations of its new-found authority.³³ As remarkable events continued to take place in the summer and autumn of 1789, seemingly related to this first ‘revolution’, usage expanded to comprehend ‘les révolutions de Paris’ and ultimately a ‘French Revolution’ – denoting a process rather

than a moment – only to give way in 1792 to the Jacobin-led ‘second’ Revolution.³⁴ Needless to say, all these rhetorical extensions served the interests of political factions who sought thereby to legitimise their actions.

Many more examples could be given of how discourses of revolution have been used to justify proposed or accomplished structural change, from Russia after 1917 to Spain in the 1930s to Hungary in 1956. The point is that participants in all these so-called revolutions have chosen their terminology as instruments of legitimation or delegitimation. The particular meaning of *revolution* has varied considerably over time, since the experience of ‘revolution’ has shaped theories of the phenomenon in a ‘conversation’ that is still ongoing, but the practical link between usage of the term and political claims to legitimacy has remained constant.

Another commonality in all the sequences of socio-political events that participants have called ‘revolutions’ is that they have given birth to new or reconfigured master signifiers – the sacred to which legitimacy points. These signifiers – the ‘nation’, the ‘people’, ‘revolution’ – are always representations of the new sense of community formed in the course of the events in question.³⁵ Whether Providence or the citizenry is seen as the cause, the agent is always divine, a transcendent referent that gives structure to political discourse but is not symbolically dependent on it. Historically, therefore, we can say that a precondition for the emergence of a commonly shared sense of revolution is an experience of collective effervescence that gives rise to a reconfigured master signifier representing ‘the people’ in a divine role as the authors of their destinies. In the words of a Czech witticism from 1989: ‘Let there be light – said the people.’³⁶

The revolutions of 1989 clearly fit these patterns. In countries where mobilising citizens consciously appropriated the word *revolution* to describe their experience, they clearly did so to accentuate the legitimacy of their actions and the illegitimacy of those who might oppose them. Subsequently, reference to the collective experience of 1989 would be used to emphasise the legitimacy of socio-political structures or to call their legitimacy into question. Even in countries where citizens at the time did not identify unfolding history as revolutionary, a pervasive sense later emerged that revolutions *should* have taken place, such that references to 1989 could serve legitimising or delegitimising purposes similar to those in the first group of countries. In both cases, the signifiers ‘revolution’ and ‘1989’ have enjoyed a transcendent status comparable to that of ‘socialism’ prior to 1989, recalling a moment of sacred unity when the body politic assembled and collectively decided upon its future – or when this should have happened.

A frequent objection to the claim that revolutions occurred in 1989 is that resultant change was inadequate, particularly in terms of socio-economic stratification. To expect that revolutions should completely

transform all political, social and economic structures, however, is to succumb to a mythological view of revolution. As the historian Lynn Hunt writes of the French Revolution, echoing Alexis de Tocqueville:

the social and economic changes brought about by the Revolution were not revolutionary. Nobles were able to return to their titles and to much of their land. Although considerable amounts of land changed hands during the Revolution, the structure of landholding remained much the same; the rich got richer ... In the realm of politics, in contrast, almost everything changed.³⁷

As in 1789, so in 1989, the most significant changes were political and cultural. The revolutions created space where citizens, for a time, could directly participate in public affairs, producing the experiential foundation of a fresh and democratic political culture. Though Germans, Czechs, Slovaks and Romanians may lament that the potential of this experience was not fully realised, few deny that it was an inherently worthwhile experience. It is also an experience that continues to inspire, both domestically and abroad. Whereas before 1989, would-be revolutionaries the world over looked to communist ‘revolutions’ for their inspiration, today the most widely invoked model is that of the Central European revolutions of 1989. This in itself is a reversal of historic proportions.

Notes

- 1 R. V. Daniels, *The End of the Communist Revolution* (London, 1993), p. 16.
- 2 M. S. Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York, 1988), p. 36.
- 3 Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, p. 36.
- 4 I. T. Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe 1944–1993: Detour from the Periphery to the Periphery* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 269; R. Okey, *The Demise of Communist East Europe: 1989 in Context* (London, 2004), pp. 50, 52–3.
- 5 M. Pullmann, *Konec experimentu: Přestavba a pád komunismu v Československu* (Prague, 2011); A. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, 2006).
- 6 E. Neubert, *Unsere Revolution: Die Geschichte der Jahre 1989/90* (Munich, 2008), p. 138; J. Krapfl, ‘Revolution and Revolt against Revolution: Czechoslovakia, 1989’, in K. McDermott and M. Stibbe (eds), *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule* (Oxford, 2006), p. 178. Estimates of the number of marchers on 9 October reach as high as 95,000, but ‘70,000’ is the figure most often cited in public discourse; see G. Dale, *The East German Revolution of 1989* (Manchester, 2006), p. 8.

- 7 See, for example, 'Jednomyslnost ve škole demokracie', *Proto*, no. 5 (June 1989), p. 4; J. Bryndová, 'Londýnská abeceda', *Proto*, no. 6 (September 1989), p. 10; M. Podobský, 'Drobničky ze sovětské kultury', *ibid.*, p. 11; V. Bartuška, 'Vlak do stanice zítra', *ibid.*, p. 22.
- 8 R. Darnton, *Berlin Journal, 1989–1990* (New York, 1991), p. 9.
- 9 I. Langer in M. Otáhal and M. Vaněk (eds), *Sto studentských revolucí: Studenti v období pádu komunismu – životopisná výprávení* (Prague, 1999), p. 521.
- 10 J. Krapfl, *Revolúcia s ľudskou tvárou: Politika, kultúra a spoločenstvo v Československu po 17. novembri 1989* (Bratislava, 2009), pp. 60–4.
- 11 Státní okresní archiv Louny, fond 569, box 1, folder 4 'Roedl', subfolder 'Dějiny veselé revoluce'; S. Heym and W. Heiduczek (eds), *Die sanfte Revolution: Prosa, Lyrik, Protokolle, Erlebnisberichte, Reden* (Leipzig, 1990), p. 339; 'Proč stále Stalinova?', *Kladenská záře*, 20 December 1989, p. 5; Ústav pro soudobé dějiny, Prague, Archiv KC OF, folder 'Zápisy z rady OF (C)', Rada KC OF, 13 February 1990.
- 12 'Víme, s kým chceme jít', December 1989, Státní okresní archiv Cheb, fond 1063, SB46 'Občanské fórum', box 1, folder 'Projevy, referáty, zprávy'.
- 13 'Kto sme, odkiaľ prichádzame, kam sa poberáme? Úvahy o ľuďoch občianskych iniciatív', *Reflex* (Komárno), 18 January 1990, p. 3.
- 14 Quoted in H. James and M. Stone (eds), *When the Wall Came Down: Reactions to German Unification* (New York, 1992), p. xv.
- 15 'Študenti! My, poslucháči Vysokej vojenskej leteckej školy ...', Štátny archív v Košiciach, pobočka Košice, zbierka ku nežnej revolúcii, folder 'Rôzne'.
- 16 Neubert, *Unsere Revolution*, p. 140.
- 17 J. Suk (ed.), *Občanské fórum: Listopad-prosinec 1989*, vol. 2: *Dokumenty* (Brno, 1998), p. 202. Later, in February 1990, Havel said he looked forward to 'the demise of the last traces of revolutionary chaos'. J. Suk, *Labyrintem revoluce: Aktéři, zápletky a křížovatky jedné politické krize (od listopadu 1989 do června 1990)* (Prague, 2003), p. 280.
- 18 'Projev P. Pitharta v čs. televizi [sic]', *inForum*, no. 11 (23 January 1990), pp. 1–3.
- 19 'Něžná?', *Kontakt* (Louny), no. 7 (25 May 1990), p. 1.
- 20 'Volební program', Státní okresní archiv Benešov, box 'Soudobá dokumentace: Volby 1990'.
- 21 V. Mečiar, 'Aby ľudia mali komu veriť (Vystúpenie Vladimíra Mečiara na stretnutí PZDS v Martine dňa 23.3.1991)', *Telefax VPN*, no. 4/91 (26 March 1991), p. 6.
- 22 'The Timișoara Proclamation, March 1990', *Making the History of 1989*, item no. 691, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/691> (last accessed 21 September 2012).
- 23 While the East German reversals have been well documented in English, the Czechoslovak have not. The best discussion is in Suk, *Labyrintem*.

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- 26 T. Grabowski, 'The Party That Never Was: The Rise and Fall of the Solidarity Citizens' Committees in Poland', *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1996), pp. 214–54.
- 27 J. Kis, 'Between Reform and Revolution: Three Hypotheses about the Nature of the Regime Change', in B. Király (ed.), *Lawful Revolution in Hungary, 1989–94* (Boulder, 1995), pp. 33–59; and J. Kis, 'Between Reform and Revolution', *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 12, no. 2 (1998), pp. 300–83.
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- 29 J. Krapfl, 'Passing the Baton, Not the Banana: The 20th-Anniversary Commemorations of 1989 in Kraków, Budapest, Leipzig, Prague, Bratislava, Brno, and Timișoara', and S. Pearce, 'Commemorating Revolution and Absence of Revolution: Poland, Germany, Hungary, the Czech & Slovak Republics, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Romania in 2009', papers presented at the annual convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, Los Angeles, November 2010.
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- 31 F.-H. de Virieu, *Dialogue sur l'établissement et la formation des assemblées provinciales* (1787), quoted in K. M. Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 215–16; N. de Condorcet, *Réflexions d'un citoyen sur la révolution de 1788* (Paris, 1788).
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Index

- Aboimov, I. 117, 128
Afanas'ev, Yu. 63
Afghanistan 6, 20, 41, 48, 57, 102, 139
Aleksandrov, Ch. 65
Alexander Nevski Cathedral 256
Allinson, M. 77
Andropov, Yu. xv, xviii, 6
Antall, J. 128
anti-Semitism 9, 221
Arab Spring 3, 48–9
Armbruster, C. 3
Association of Friends of the USA 163
Auer, S. 67
Auschwitz 141
Austro-Hungarian border 4, 16, 23, 65, 80, 115, 126, 223, 273
Axen, H. 78, 80

Bahr, E. 139
Bahro, R. 144
Baker, J. 127
Balcerowicz, L. 40
Bastille 39, 217, 280
Baumgartner, E. 118
Bausoldaten 138
Berend, I. T. 19
Berlin Wall xiv, xvi, 4, 13, 17, 18, 37, 64, 80, 82, 83, 224, 245, 253, 255, 268
Berov, L. 202, 203
Bianco, J. L. 123

Bibó, I. 43
Biermann, W. 144
Blair, T. 20
Bloch, E. 218
Blot, J. 123
Bogomolov, O. 57
Bohley, B. 146
Bolsheviks 8, 36, 224, 242, 272
Bramke, W. 25
Brandt, W. 139, 145
Brandys, K. 35
Brecht, B. 216
Brezhnev, L. xiv, xv, xviii, 6, 7, 12, 57, 68, 73, 74, 114, 155, 193, 218, 227
Brezhnev Doctrine 12, 27, 57, 80, 115, 116, 118, 127, 128, 129
Brown, A. 2
Brucan, S. 179
Bulgarian Agrarian National Union 198, 259
Bulgarian Communist Party, see Communist Party
Bulgarian Socialist Party xix, 17, 199–208, 257, 260, 261, 262, 265, 266
Burke, E. 33
Büscher, W. 144
Bush, G. Snr 34, 47, 56, 64, 83, 84, 99, 116, 118, 120, 121, 123, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129

- Caramitru, I. 181
 Carlsson, I. 118
 Carter, J. 114
 Castle, M. 235, 238
 Catholic Church 15, 66, 96, 97, 103,
 141, 163, 216, 246
 Ceauşescu, N. xviii, 7, 18, 19, 21, 59,
 62, 65, 81, 172, 174–82, 184, 185,
 187, 188
 Ceauşescu, E. xvi, 19, 174
 Centre Agreement 239
 Chankova, Y. 260
 Charter 77 xiv, 7, 9, 14, 18, 162
 Chernenko, K. xv, xviii, 6, 57, 59
 Chernobyl 10, 102, 138, 142
 Chernyaev, A. 57, 59, 61, 68
 Christian Democratic Union (CDU)
 43, 120, 145
 Churchill, W. 85
 ‘City of Truth’ camp 200, 257, 263
 Civic Forum 14, 18, 20, 40, 274, 275,
 276, 277
 Civic Platform 236
 ‘Civil Disobedience’ movement 263,
 264
 civil rights 40, 137, 138, 143, 146, 147,
 148, 156, 164, 165, 196
 civil society 2, 11, 23, 36, 46, 69, 207
 ‘Club for the Support of Glasnost and
 Reorganisation in Bulgaria’ 197
 Cold War 4, 8, 23, 45, 46, 68, 76, 79,
 85, 86, 87, 98, 99, 102, 116, 117,
 126, 129, 136, 137, 139, 141,
 142, 143, 147, 148
 Committee for the Protection of
 Religious Rights, Freedom of
 Conscience and Religious
 Values 196
 Committee for State Security,
 see KGB
 Common Market,
 see European Union
 Communist Party
 Bulgarian (BCP) xix, 195, 196, 199,
 255, 257, 258, 260, 261, 267
 Czechoslovak (KSC) xix, 164, 167
 East German (SED) xix, 23, 73–84,
 138, 140, 144, 146, 147, 148, 217,
 218, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224,
 273, 275
 German (KPD) 217
 Great Britain (CPGB) 215
 Hungarian (MSzMP) xvi, xix, 16,
 114, 116, 118–23, 128
 Polish (PZPR) xx, 15, 23, 39, 96,
 108, 236, 237, 245
 Romanian (RCP) xx
 Soviet (CPSU) xiv, xv, 55, 62, 73,
 96, 194, 217, 273
 Conference on Security and
 Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)
 7, 137, 194
 Congress of People’s Deputies 63
 Connor, W. 36
 Council for Mutual Economic Aid
 (Comecon) 23, 61, 115, 120, 122,
 193
 Council of Europe 80
 Cradock, P. 125
 Cranston, A. 121
 Czech Children 38
 Czechoslovak Helsinki Committee
 163

 Dahrendorf, R. 33, 40, 218, 226
 Dalos, G. 219
 Daniels, R. V. 3
 Darnton, R. 38, 274
 Dawisha, K. 59
 Decade of Spiritual Renewal 163
 De Michelis, G. 119
 Democratic Initiative 163
 Democratic League for the Protection
 of Human Rights 255
 Democratic Left Alliance 235
 Democratic Party – Liberal (PD-L) 174
 detente 7, 13, 14, 36, 97, 140, 145
 de Tocqueville, A. 35, 76, 282
 Dimitrov, F. 201, 203
 Dimitrov, G. xvii, 254, 261, 262, 266,
 267, 277
 Dimitrov, G. M. 259

- Dinescu, M. 181
dissidents 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 20,
22, 23, 34, 37, 38, 40, 43, 62, 76,
144, 162, 163, 164, 167, 172, 184,
194, 196, 198, 200, 213, 214, 217,
228, 253, 255, 259, 273
- Djilas, M. 66
Djurov, D. 197
Dobrev, N. 205, 206
Dobrynin, A. 59, 75, 117
Doganov, M. 193
Donaldson, R. H. 68
Dönhoff, Countess M. 213, 214
Dubček, A. xvii, 18
- Eagleburger, L. 126, 128
Eberlein, W. 76, 84
Ecoglasnost 256
ecology/environmentalism 8, 10, 36,
38, 73, 102, 103, 115, 119, 138,
140, 142, 144, 146, 162, 196, 197,
228, 253, 256
- Elster, J. 39
Engels, F. 217, 225
Enlightenment 37, 38
Epstein, C. 214
Estates General 39, 280
European Campaign for Nuclear
Disarmament (END) 145
European Community,
see European Union
European Union (EU) 22, 45, 85, 86,
110, 115, 119, 123, 125, 278
‘Euroshima’ 141
- Fair-Schulz, A. 214
Falcke, H. 145
Falin, V. 61, 77, 82, 83, 86
fascism 3, 222
Federation of Fighting Youth 103
Fighting Solidarity 101
‘For a Democratic Slovakia’ 276
Free German Youth 144
Free Democratic Party (FDP) 137
Freedom and Peace Movement (WiP)
102
- French Revolution, 1789 3, 22, 33, 35,
38, 39, 40, 44, 46, 47, 62, 224,
280, 282
- Frischenschläger, F. 118
FSN, see National Salvation Front
Fuchs, J. 145
Fuchs, K. 215, 216
Fulbrook, M. 4
Fülberth, G. 225
Fukuyama, F. 33, 41
- Garthoff, R. 65
Garton Ash, T. 1, 16, 23, 36, 39, 85,
222, 226
- Gauck, J. 278
gay rights 10
Geertz, C. 47
General Electric 114
Genscher, H.-D. 84, 85, 120
Gerasimov, G. 80, 83
Giddens, A. 20
Gierek, E. xviii, 96, 97
Giscard D’Estaing, V. 123
glasnost xv, 2, 12, 56, 58, 62, 65, 73,
75, 76, 77, 79, 99, 154, 163, 172,
194, 196, 213, 214, 219, 220, 227,
228
- Goma, P. 7
Gomułka, W. xviii, 96
Göncz, A. 277
- Gorbachev, M. S. xv, xvi, xvii, 2, 4, 6,
9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 23, 33, 35,
37, 38, 55–61, 68, 69, 73–87, 98,
99, 106, 107, 115, 116, 117, 118,
121, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129,
137, 142, 156, 172, 192, 193, 194,
195, 213, 214, 219, 220, 221, 222,
223, 224, 226, 227, 256, 271,
272, 273, 274, 280
- Gorbacheva, R. 64
Government of National Unity 275
Grachev, A. 57, 60, 61, 64, 66
Grand National Assembly 199, 200,
201
- Green Party 144, 145
Grishin, V. 58

- Grix, J. 73
 Gromyko, A. 59, 86
 Grosser, D. 86
 Grósz, K. xvii, 65, 122
 Gurr, T. 66, 67
 Gysi, G. 234
 Gysi, K. 140
- Habsburg, O. von 16
 Hager, K. 76, 80, 216, 217, 219, 220, 224
 Hall, A. 239
 Hankiss, E. 36
 ‘happenings’ 11, 103
 Harriman, A. 114
 Haslam, J. 13
 Havel, V. 9, 10, 14, 18, 20, 35, 38, 40, 275, 276, 277
 Helsinki Final Act 5, 7, 9, 97, 145
 Hempel, J. 140
 Hennekine, L. 123
 Himmler, H. 216
 Hiroshima 141
 Hitler, A. 78, 86, 216
 Hobsbawm, E. 69, 216, 219, 225
 Honecker, E. xvii, 6, 57, 59, 61, 62, 65, 73–82, 115, 146, 147, 217, 218, 219, 220, 222, 223, 226, 227, 273, 275
 Honecker, M. 81
 Horn, G. 65, 118, 120, 124, 125
 Horn, H. 73
 Howe, G. 124
 Hughes, G. 124
 human rights 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 21, 97, 102, 137, 143, 145, 194, 197, 198, 228, 255, 267
 Humboldt University, (East) Berlin 216, 218
 Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) 121, 122
 Hungarian Socialist Party xvi, xix, 16, 121
 Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party, see Communist Party
 Hunt, L. 282
- Huntington, S. 35
 Hurd, D. 125
 Husák, G. xvii, 6, 18, 65, 80, 275
 Hutchings, R. 122, 124, 127
- Iliescu, I. 19, 68, 172, 173, 174, 176, 178, 180, 182–88, 276
 Independent Hungarian Initiative 275
 Independent Peace Association 163
 Independent Society for the Protection of Human Rights 196
 Independent Students’ Association 104
 International Monetary Fund (IMF) 204, 205, 206
 Iron Curtain xv, 80, 113, 114, 115, 122, 129, 136, 145
- Jakeš, M. xvii, 65, 167
 Jarausch, K. 214
 Jaruzelski, W. xviii, 23, 37, 39, 62, 66, 97, 99, 105, 106, 108, 126, 128, 236
 Jazz Section 11
 John Lennon Peace Club 38
 Johnson, C. 66, 67
 Joseph II, Emperor 37, 44, 49
 Judt, T. 13, 22
 ‘July Conception’ 195
- Kaczynski, J. 239
 Kaczynski, L. 244
 Kádár, J. xvii, 57, 59, 61, 62, 65, 113, 114, 118, 119, 124, 126, 273
 Kania, S. xviii, 97
 Kelly, P. 144
 Kemal Atatürk 37
 Kemenes, E. 123
 Kenney, P. 10
 Keßler, H. 80, 81
 KGB 65, 83, 125, 197
 Khrushchev, N. S. xiv, xviii, 213, 217
 Kirkheimer, O. 67
 Kis, J. 38, 278
 Klaus, V. 20, 40
 Klestil, T. 118

- Knabe, H. 144
 Kochemasov, V. 79
 Kohl, H. 64, 83, 84, 85, 86, 120, 121, 122, 128, 275
 Kołakowski, L. 35
 Komárek, V. 158
 Konrád, G. 37, 38
 Kopecký, M. 161, 162
 Kornienko, G. 59, 86
 KOR, see Workers' Defence Committee
 Koselleck, R. 214, 227, 228
 Kossuth, L. 40, 41
 Kostov, I. 203, 207
 Kostov, T. 261, 263
 Kotkin, S. 2
 Kovács, L. 125
 Kowalczyk, I.-S. 234
 Kramer, M. 13
 Krenz, E. xvii, 147, 223, 275, 276
 Kriuchkov, V. 65
 Kubik, J. 237
 Kuczynski, J. 8, 75, 213–28
 Kuczynski, R. R. 215
 Kuczynski, U. 215
 Kuroń, J. 38
 Kusin, V. V. 58
 Kwaśniewski, A. 43, 100

 Laclau, E. 238
 Laski, H. 215
 Law and Justice Party 236
 Leipzig demonstrations xv, 17, 223, 274, 279
 Lenin, V.I. 4, 66, 213, 214, 215, 217, 218, 219, 220, 223, 224, 227, 228, 272, 273, 274, 279
 Lévesque, J. 13
 Liebknecht, K. 146, 221
 Ligachev, Ye. 63, 86
 Lilov, A. 118
 Lindemann, M.-L. 144
 Lindenberger, T. 77, 148
 Louis XVI 39, 280
 Louis XVIII 44
 Lubbers, R. 127
 Lukanov, A. 197, 198, 200, 201, 203, 205, 257
 Luxemburg, R. 146, 221

 Macmillan, H. 37
 mafia (Bulgarian) 202, 264
 'Magdalenka' 236, 237, 239, 241, 242, 244, 245, 247, 248, 249
 Magg, W. 144
 Major, J. 125
 Malta Summit 83, 84, 118, 128
 Mann, M. 140
 martial law xv, 7, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 104, 106, 107, 139, 240
 Marx, K. 47, 217, 224, 225
 Marxism 23, 35, 46, 98, 215
 Marxism-Leninism 10, 20, 46, 142, 228
 Masaryk, T. G. 163
 Mazowiecki, T. xv, 15, 66, 105, 108, 237, 238, 239, 241, 242, 243, 244, 247
 McElvoy, A. 216, 226
 Mečiar, V. 276
 Medvedev, V. 59
 Michta, A. 66
 Mielke, E. 73, 74, 82
 Miller, L. 100
 Milošević, S. 47
 Ministry for State Security (MfS), see Stasi
 Miodowicz, A. 104
 Mischnick, W. 120
 Mitterrand, F. 1, 22, 64, 84, 122, 123, 129
 Mladenov, P. xvii, 17, 197, 198, 200, 256
 Mlynář, Z. 62
 Mock, A. 119
 Modrow, H. 12, 23, 83, 84, 147, 234
 Momper, W. 82
 Movement for an Alternative Society 101
 Movement for Civil Freedom 163
 Movement for Poland's Reconstruction 239

- Movement for Rights and Freedom 199
- Movement for the Republic 239
- Mubarak, H. 38, 48
- Mulroney, B. 118
- Napoleon Bonaparte 35
- Napoleon III 35
- National Assembly
 Bulgaria 195, 198, 199, 200, 201, 206
 France 280
- National Liberal Party (PNL) 173, 174, 184
- National Movement Simeon II 207
- National Peasant Party (PNȚ) 173, 184
- National People's Army 82
- National Salvation Front (FSN) xx, 19, 172–87, 276
- NATO 23, 45, 64, 85, 86, 110, 113, 123, 125, 129, 136, 137, 139, 145, 221
- Naumann, K. 218, 219
- Nazi Party/Nazism 9, 41, 87, 215, 216, 221
- Neagu, F. 178
- Nelson, A. 73
- Németh, M. xv, 16, 118, 121, 124, 125, 127
- Neumann, H. 216
- New Economic Policy 272
- New Forum 17, 277, 278
- Nogee, J. L. 68
- nomenklatura* 43, 218, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247
- 'normalisation' 9, 76, 97, 98, 99, 100, 102, 106, 107, 195, 208
- Nyers, R. xvii, 120, 121, 127
- Obama, B. 38
- Olszewski, J. 239
- Orange Alternative 38, 103
- 'Orange Revolution' 3
- Orbán, V. 271, 278
- Ost, D. 42
- Ostpolitik* 119, 139, 145
- Outhwaite, W. 22
- 'palace coup' 17, 197, 207, 257, 277
- Palach, J. 18
- Palacký, F. 40, 42
- Palazchenko, P. 59, 65, 68
- Palmer, M. 116
- 'Pan-European Picnic' xv, 16, 115
- Paris Peace Conference 33, 42
- Party House fire 254, 261, 262, 264, 265
- Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) xix, 21, 217, 224, 225, 226
- Parvanov, G. 206, 207
- peace movements 4, 8, 11, 102, 136–48
- People's Court 259, 261
- perestroika* xv, 2, 11, 12, 15, 55, 56, 58, 60–6, 69, 73, 76, 77, 78, 79, 81, 86, 99, 116, 124, 154, 155, 156, 157, 160, 161, 166, 167, 172, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 198, 213, 214, 219, 222, 227, 228, 255, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 279
- Petro, N. 60
- Petrova, M. 264
- Petru, O. 177
- Peukert, D. 215
- Philippe, Louis 44
- Pflüger, F. 122
- Pirinski, G. 205
- Pithart, P. 276
- pluralism 2, 23, 80, 109, 136, 192, 195, 196
- Politburo
 Bulgarian 195, 196, 197, 256, 259
 East German 74, 76, 77, 80, 81, 84, 216, 218, 220, 223, 224
 Hungarian 16
 Soviet 57, 59, 86
- Podkrepa* 196, 200, 255, 256, 262
- Popov, D. 201, 203
- Poppe, U. 146
- Portugalov, N. 86
- Popieluszko, J. 9
- 'post-totalitarianism' 9, 10
- Potsdam Conference 64

- Pozsgay, I. 16, 123, 124
 Prague Spring xiv, 7, 9, 18, 62, 96, 163
 Priestland, D. 226
 privatisation 6, 203, 204
 Protestant Church 8, 37, 138, 141, 144, 145
 Provisional Council of National Unity (PCUN) 186
 Public against Violence (VPN) 18, 275, 276
 'Public Committee for the Ecological Protection of Russe' 196–7, 256

 Radio Free Europe 167
 Rakhmanin, O. 57
 Rakowski, M. xviii, 15, 65, 66, 81
 Ratford, D. 125
 Reagan, R. 6, 20, 64, 99, 114
 'real existing socialism' 9, 140, 154, 155, 165, 219
 Red Army xiv, 12, 82, 86, 87, 95
 Reinhold, O. 77
 Revival – the Club for Socialist Renovation 163
 Revolutions
 1830 224
 1848 3, 33, 34, 39–44, 47, 49, 224
 1917 3, 4, 22, 62, 213, 224, 226, 258, 272, 281
 Rey, M.-P. 68
 Rogers, W. 126
 Roma 193
 Roman, P. 172, 173, 177, 183
 Romanian Army 180, 181
 'Rose Revolution' 3
 Rousseau, J.-J. 38, 40
 Round Table talks
 Bulgarian 17, 198, 199, 257
 East German 147
 Hungarian xv, 16, 273
 Polish xv, 15, 22, 39, 41, 62, 66, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 198, 236–49, 273, 277
 Rubinstein, A. 60
 Rühle, V. 120, 121
 Russe 197, 256
 Sakharov, A. 163
samizdat 8, 11, 138, 164
 Schabowski, G. 74
 Schmidt, H. 114, 139, 140
 Schöpflin, G. 68
 Schreiber, T. 122
 Scowcroft, B. 127
 Sebestyen, V. 227
 Second World War 12, 36, 41, 84, 87, 95, 101, 115, 141, 143, 259
Securitate 19, 173–79, 184, 185
 Séguéla, J. 260
 Semerdjiev, A. 264
 Shakhnazarov, G. 57, 58, 59, 76
 Shcherbitskii, V. 58
 Shevardnadze, E. 56, 59, 82, 83, 85, 86, 117, 127, 128
 show trials xiv, 258, 261
 Shumaker, D. H. 86
 Šimečka, M. 44
 'Sinatra Doctrine' 27, 80
 Skak, M. 68
 Skocpol, T. 66, 67
 Smallholders' Party 122
 Snagov 178
 Social Democratic Party (PSD) 173, 174, 184
 Social Democratic Party (SPD) 121, 137, 146, 221
 Socialist Union of Youth 11, 167
 Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED),
 see Communist Party
 Society of T. G. Masaryk 163
 Solidarity (*Solidarność*) xiv, xv, 6, 7, 9, 15, 23, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 65, 66, 97–109, 121, 124, 139, 235, 236, 237, 238, 240, 241, 243–9, 255, 273, 277, 278, 279
 Solzhenitsyn, A. 8
 Soros, G. 114
 Späth, L. 120
 Stalin, J. V. xiv, xviii, 8, 9, 43, 68, 78, 217, 227
 Stalinism 9, 23, 217, 218
 Stalinist terror 20, 216

- Stanchev, P. 262
 Stasi 28, 74, 78, 82, 83
 Stent, A. 222
 Stoleru, L. 123
 Stoyanov, P. 205, 206
 Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) 6
 students xvi, 16, 18, 40, 43, 79, 96, 97,
 100, 102, 103, 104, 107, 167, 181,
 183, 200, 201, 206, 216, 218, 221,
 228, 257, 267, 274, 275, 278
 Sung, Kim Il 81
 Szelenyi, I. 36
 Szokai, I. 116
 Szűrös, M. 127

 ‘terrorism’ 146, 194
 Thatcher, M. 8, 20, 87, 120, 124, 125
 ‘thick line’ policy 236, 237, 239,
 241–49
 Third Polish Republic 108, 249
 Tiananmen Square 109, 147
 Tilly, C. 66, 67
 Tismaneanu, V. 2
 Tóké, L. 19
 Tolubeev, N. 197
 Trenchev, K. 255, 262
 Trotskyists 246
 Turkish minority (Bulgaria) 192, 193,
 194

 Ulbricht, W. xvii, 76, 217, 227
 Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) 17,
 198–203, 206, 207, 256, 257, 260,
 262, 266, 278
 United Nations 63, 79, 139, 142
 Urban, J. 14

 Valchev, T. 205
 Várkonyi, P. 124
 Vass, L. 123
 ‘Velvet Revolution’ xvi, 18, 47
 Verdery, K. 259
 Videnov, Zh. 203, 204, 205, 265
 Vinen, R. 227
 Vogel, H.-J. 121

 Volkskammer 216, 217, 224
 Vranitzky, F. 118

 Waldegrave, W. 125
 Wałęsa, L. 66, 102, 104, 105, 121, 241,
 255, 277
 Warsaw Pact xiv, xv, 4, 6, 13, 14, 15,
 16, 23, 57, 58, 73, 80, 82, 85, 96,
 113, 116, 117, 118, 120–29, 136,
 164, 222
 Wegener, H. 113
 Weitz, E. 214, 228
 Weizsäcker, R. von 87, 120
 Wensierski, P. 144
 Whitehead, J. 126
 Witte, S. 35
 Wojtyła, K. 97
 Wolf, H. 218
 Wolf, M. 234
 Wolle, S. 214
 Workers’ Defence Committee (KOR)
 xiv, 7
 workers’ strikes 19, 96, 97, 100, 240,
 257
 Working Group for GDR Citizenship
 Rights 8
 Working Group of Protestant Youth
 144
 World Peace Council 143

 Yakovlev, A. 59, 68, 78, 82, 86, 89
 Yalta Conference 64, 68, 95, 113, 122
 Yazov, D. 117
 Yeltsin, B. xvi, 63, 68
 Yevtushenko, Ye. 75
 Young, H. 8

zadyma 101, 103
 Zeman, M. 166
 Zhelev, Zh. 198, 200, 202, 205, 256,
 257, 264
 Zhivkov, T. xvi, xvii, 6, 17, 56, 61,
 121, 193–9, 254, 255–60, 267,
 273, 277, 278
 Zylla, E. 144